

I Call You Friends

John 15:12-17

Call: Ps 147 (adapted)

Scripture: Phil 2:1-4 (MSG)

I. Intro

Good morning! According to Charlie Brown, this is what a friend is: A friend is someone who knows all your faults, but likes you anyway. Along those same lines, an older book for children was simply called, *A Friend is Someone Who Likes You* (Ellithorpe, 8). But, is friendship really that important these days?

Some of you may know the name Susan Phillips. She's a Christian sociologist, professor and writer from up the road in Berkeley. A few years ago she did a lecture called *Friendship Matters*, where she shared the current state of friendship in our culture. She said that friendship in the western world is declining rapidly due to friendship being viewed as ordinary, unnecessary, private and largely unexamined. In the west, friendship is only a common garden variety kind of love. After all, don't we have an expression that goes like this, "We're just friends"? Furthermore, she argues, doesn't friendship get trumped daily in adult life by family needs, work needs, even hobby needs? Phillips isn't alone in this assessment. Years ago, CS Lewis wrote similar things about friendship. But, then, there's this famous song which speaks of disdaining friendship. It goes like this,

*"I've built walls,
A fortress deep and mighty,
That none may penetrate,
I have no need of friendship,
friendship causes pains,
It's laughter and it's loving I disdain,
I am a rock,
I am an island."* That of course is Simon and Garfunkel from the 60's.

So, what are we to do when Jesus says to his disciples, "*I call you friends*"? What are we to do when the king of kings and lord of lords offers his friendship to us?

Review

We've been walking through the Upper Room Discourse with the disciples, and this week we come to the very center of this discourse.

As many have noticed, this discourse *is* structured in the shape of a chiasm. This is a bit technical, but I think it's helpful for understanding our passage today. As many of you know, much of the Bible is written in these kinds of structures because this is how the middle eastern mind thinks. And, the point of these structures is to work toward a center of a passage, then repeat those same points, but in light of new themes or topics. The key to the entire passage is

usually found in the very center of a chiasm. This is the text that is before us today. The very center of the upper room discourse.

A. Love to the end (13:1)

B. Hour, love, glory, going, knowing (ch 13)

C. Troubled, paraclete, disciples, orphans (ch 14)

D. Abide and bear fruit (15:1-11)

E. Command to love (15:12)

X. "I call you friends" (15:13-16)

E' Command to love (15:17)

D' Abide and witness within persecution (15:18-27)

C' Travail, paraclete, world, "you will see me again" (ch 16)

B' Hour, love, glory, going, knowing (ch 17)

A' Love of the Trinity in us (17:26)

In this structure, we have chapters 13 and 17 framing the discourse, with the first verse and last verse of the discourse feeding into the center. Chapters 14 and 16 provide teaching on the paraclete, on love and on being disciples of Jesus. The vine and branches passage which is all about abiding in Jesus pairs with the fact that we abide in the midst of great persecution. Then, we have the command to love framing our passage today. And, in the middle, Jesus offers his friendship to us.

So, let's start with the love command, verses 12 and 17.

II. The Invitation To Love (12, 17)

12 *"This is my commandment, that you **love** (agape) one another as I have **loved** (agape) you*

...

17 *These things I command you, so that you will **love** (agape) one another. (ESV)*

A. The Love Command

If you remember, Jesus already gave the invitation to love in chapter 13. Jesus began the discourse by saying he would love his disciples until the end. He then demonstrated that love by washing their feet, followed by his love command. He called it a new command, John 13:34, *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another"* (John 13:34-35).

Jesus really wants us to love. It's the clearest evidence of our love for him, it's the clearest evidence of the Holy Spirit, the paraclete, abiding in us, and it's the clearest evidence that we are abiding in Jesus. As disciples of Jesus, we love. That's what we do.

B. The Importance of Love

Isn't it telling that in Jesus' last teaching on earth, he focuses so much on love? He doesn't focus on doctrinal purity or church government or how to do a Sunday morning worship service? He focuses on love. He really wants us to love. And, people will know we belong to Jesus by our love.

So, the love commands surround the center of this discourse, verses 13-16.

III. The Offer of Friendship (15:13-16)

13 Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command you. 15 No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. 16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.

A. Not *only* Servants (“*douloi*”)

“You are my friends,” Jesus says. *“No longer do I call you servants, but I call you friends.”* Now, from the rest of scripture, what Jesus means here is *“No longer do I [only] call you servants.”* No longer do I [only] call you “*douloi*,” the Greek word for servants. For as he demonstrated in the foot-washing, they, the disciples (and we), are still servants. Being a servant is not shameful. Not at all! After all, Jesus is called a servant in the great Philippians hymn. Jesus, *“who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant”* (Phil 2:6-7).

Indeed, throughout Scripture, to be a servant of the Lord is a great honor. Moses and Joshua, David and Solomon are called servants of the Lord. Who wouldn't want to be called a servant of the Lord? To be a servant follows in the footsteps of Jesus who came *“not to be served but to serve and give his life away”* (Matt 20:28). What Jesus means is *“No longer do I [only] call you servants.”* To be a called a servant is a great honor!

B. Friends (“*philoï*”)

Jesus says, *“No longer do I only call you ‘douloi,’ servants, I call you ‘philoï,’ friends.”*

At the beginning of this discourse, Jesus said he would love his disciples to the end, to the goal, to the destiny, to the fullest extent. Jesus will love his disciples to the end. Could it be that “*philoï*,” which is the plural of “*philos*,” is the *end* of his love? Could it be that *philoï* is the fullest extent of Jesus' “*agape*” love?

C. The Four Loves

You probably know that there are four words in the Greek language for love. We only have one in English, which is probably why there is so much confusion about love. The Greeks would have rolled their eyes at us. No, actually, they would have been shocked by our simplicity that

we could whisper “I love you” to our spouse in one breath, and say, “I love mac and cheese” in the next.

The four words are:

- **Storge:** Storge is the obligatory love of family. This word describes the love of a parent for a child and a child for a parent. One simply ought to love his or her family.
- **Eros:** Eros is the love of beauty. The one that loves because of the loveliness or the goodness of the other. The love that is swept off its feet by the other.
- **Agape:** This is the love of decision. It is the love for the unlovely, the love for those who do not deserve it.
- **Philos:** Philos is the love of friends. It’s the love of mutual respect and mutual admiration, or the love of a worthy thing. We get philosophy (love of wisdom) and philanthropy (love of humanity) from this word.

D. Agape to Philos?

The New Testament writers do not describe Jesus’ love as storge love. Jesus does not love us with an obligatory kind of love. And, Jesus’ love is not described as Eros. He is not swept off his feet by our beauty or our goodness. As many of you know, Jesus’ love is typically described using the word “agape,” the love of decision for the underserved, so John 3:16: *“For God so loved (agaped) the world, he gave his only Son...”*

But, in select places, the New Testament writers do use “philos” love to describe Jesus’ love, but especially in John. Yes, John does use agape all over the place, here in his Gospel and in his letters. But it seems to me that because he uses agape so much, if he uses philos, he’s trying to make a point.

For example, when John speaks of Jesus’ love for Lazarus, he doesn’t use the word agape. He uses philos. John 11:3: *“Behold the one you love, ‘philos,’ is sick.”* In John 11:11, Jesus simply calls Lazarus his friend, *“philos.”* In John 11:36, as Jesus weeps at Lazarus’ grave, the Jews say, “See how he loved him, ‘philos’.” Now certainly, Jesus “agape” loved Lazarus, like us and every other sinner. Lazarus has no hope without the “agape” love of Jesus. And, yet, John speaks of Jesus love for Lazarus with “philos” love. Is John saying that “philos” love is the end of agape love? Is the goal of “agape” love, “philos” love? Is “philos” the full extent of God’s love?

E. Philos Described

“No longer do I [only] call you servants, douloi, but I call you friends, philoi.” Philoi is simply the plural of philos. Now in the first century, philos meant a whole lot more than the word “friend” means today. In fact, friendship love in the Greek world *was* considered the highest form of love. To love someone as philoi, as friends, is to enjoy being with another. You didn’t become someone’s friend willy-nilly. You became philoi very, very carefully. To love someone as philoi, was an amazing gift!

One New Testament scholar describes a friend in the first century as a “confidant; one to whom a secret is entrusted, because people entrust their most intimate secrets to only those whom

they love and in whom they have confidence” (Johnson). Jesus says, *“No longer do I [only] call you servants, but I call you’ confidants. You’re the ones to which I am going to share my most intimate thoughts, all that the Father has shared with me.”*

Another NT scholar says it this way: Philos means, “Natural attraction toward those who belong” (Johnson). So Jesus says, *“No longer do I [only] call you servants, but I call you philoi”* because you belong to me and with me.

Do you see the huge compliment Jesus is paying those first disciples and us? He’s sharing his most intimate thoughts with them and us. He’s opening up his heart and mind to them and us! He’s treating us as if we belong! I can imagine those first disciples, full of questions, anxiety and fear, falling off their pews when they heard Jesus say those words?

F. Examples: Moses and Abraham

But, it gets even more wonderful! This means that what God said to Moses is now said to those first disciples and to you and me. Exodus 33:11: *“The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend.”* What is said of Abraham is now said of those first disciples and you and me. James 2:23: *“Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness — and he was called a friend of God.”*

Moses and Abraham enjoyed extraordinary access to the mind of God! The Psalmist reflects on this very thing in Psalm 25:14 when he writes, *“The LORD confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them.”* The word for “confide” is the word for inner circle or intimate friendship. The picture is of the living God holding a conference to which he invites his most trusted friends. What a privilege! *“I call you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.”* This is the privilege of being philoi, of belonging. Servants don’t have that privilege. Servants don’t know, or need to know, what the master is doing. Servants obey blindly, so to speak, by doing what they’re told. Not friends. Friends are brought in because they belong. They’re told not only what to do, but also told why and how and when. They’re confidants!

G. Examples: The Beloved Disciple and The Trinity

But, it gets even more wonderful! We have the examples of Lazarus and Abraham and Moses. But, John also tells us about *“disciple whom Jesus loved”* (John 13:23, 19:26, 20:2, 21:7, 21:20). Four times he is the disciple whom Jesus “agaped.” But, on Easter morning, John 20:2, he is called the disciple whom Jesus “philos” loved. If you remember, this disciple was the one reclining in Jesus’ bosom in the upper room, as John says. He was so close to Jesus, he could feel Jesus’ heartbeat. What is astonishing (and wonderful) is that this is the same language used of Jesus’ own friendship with the Father. So, John 1:18: *“No one has ever seen God at any time; but God the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.”* The disciple whom Jesus loved resting on Jesus’ bosom mirrors Jesus resting on the Father’s bosom, the love of friendship within the trinity.

So, one ancient writer can say, "To say God is love is to say God is friendship... The Father, Son and Spirit reflect an amazing friendship of reciprocity, mutuality, cooperation, love and care. And, this intimacy is extended to us" (Ringma, 224). Wonder of wonders!

So, Jesus is saying, "I call you all friends. I invite all of you to rest in the intimacy of my bosom as I rest in the intimacy of my father's bosom. Listen to what my heart beats with, as I listen to what my Father's heart beats with."

And, what is Jesus' heartbeat? What does he desire? We find out at the end of the discourse, in Jesus' prayer to the Father:

"Father," he prays. "I am praying for them... (THAT'S US!!) Keep them from the evil one... may they all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us... that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them!"

Here Jesus say, "I call you friends. I like you. I enjoy you! Come into the circle of the Trinity! And, I will entrust my most intimate thoughts to you!"

H. Chosen

But, it gets even more wonderful! Jesus goes on to say that he chose us! We didn't choose this friendship. This is not our doing. We've been chosen! He chooses us, you and me, to be his friends. We who, according to Romans 5, are ungodly, sinful and enemies of God. Yet, Jesus, *"the friend (philos) of sinners,"* chooses us (Matt 11:19).

Martin Luther said this about friendship:

"In the world, people call others their friend because they expect to receive some benefit from them. They who are undeserving, or who cannot give help or who cannot do good to the other are not regarded as a friend. But, here in John 15, Christ calls friends those who had never done him a favor, but are poor wretched sinners, even God's enemies, and whose sins and death he takes upon himself."

Jesus calls us friends. Yes, this is the full extent of his love! This is how Jesus loves us to the end, to the fullest extent. He says, "I like you! I enjoy you! I call you my friend."

Ok. So, what does he expect of his chosen friends? What does he expect of us?

IV. Implications

A. Loyalty: As with any friendship, friends are loyal to each other. This is what any friend would expect of his or her friends. Just like he will never abandon us, we never abandon him. Of course, this goes along with abiding in the vine. Abiding in him demonstrates our loyalty to him.

- B. Cultivation:** Just like any friendship, cultivate the friendship. Make space and time for Jesus. Nurture the friendship through presence, attentiveness, availability, love and care. Invest in and cultivate this friendship.
- C. Obedience:** Verse 14. *"You are my friends if you do what I command you."* As D. A. Carson said, "Obedience is not the condition for the friendship, but rather the expression of the friendship." We listen to Jesus, then we come to trust him and believe what he's talking about and we begin believing that he has our best interest in mind. And, then we do what he commands as he does what his father commands. And, what are the fundamental commands in Chapter 15? Abide in me and love one another. As you do life in the bay area, do what Jesus says, abide in me and love one another.
- D. Extension:** Being friends with God means extending friendship to others. This is the primary fruit from these verses, for this is what we've been *"appointed to do,"* verse 16. We've been appointed to extend the friendship. Friendship with God is communal in nature. As Jim Houston says, "No one can be a friend of Jesus without having many other friends." Include others in the circle. Don't just love with decision, love as friends. Friendship with God is a calling to life in community, a life of friendship with others along the Jesus way. We befriend Jesus by befriending one another.

Now this requires great intentionality because our culture does not value healthy friendship, as I shared in the introduction. The individualism which permeates our culture forms us to put ourselves at the center of life, always putting our needs above others, while our consumerist culture exalts getting rather than giving. Furthermore, our busy-ness conditions us to believe we simply don't have time to nurture friendships. Extending the friendship will only happen if we are intentional.

And, of course, this is another chance to encourage everyone to participate in a connection group. We desire for every single person here to be part of a connection group. It is, of course, within these groups where friendships can be intentionally formed and expanded.

V. Conclusion

Let me close with this. One writer says this, "The Gospel can be put into six simple words. Jesus offers his friendship to you." He loves us because we need him to love us. We don't deserve it. But he loves us even more than that. He loves us as friends. He liked you. He enjoys you. It turns out Charlie Brown was right, "a friend is someone who knows your faults and likes you anyway." Jesus offers his friendship to us." That's the Gospel. Amen.

Benediction

Jesus says, "You are my friends.

I like you. I enjoy you.

As you go from here,

As you live life in the Bay Area this week,

Abide in me. Remain in me.

And love others just as I have loved you,

Befriend others.

Extend my friendship.

Amen. Go in peace.

Resources

Burge, Gary, *The Anointed Community*

Carson, Don, *The Farewell Discourse and Final Prayer of Jesus*

Ellithorpe, Anne-Marie, *Towards Friendship-Shaped Communities: A Practical Theology of Friendship*

Johnson, Darrell, *Preaching the Gospel According to John* (Regent College Course)

Klink, Edward, *John* (Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the NT)

Newbigin, Leslie, *The Light Has Come*

Phillips, Susan, *Friendship Matters* (Regent College Evening Lecture MP3)