

Year B, Easter 6

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Jesus said, "I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father" (John 15:15).

A father and son were fishing one day. They had a long-running friendly rivalry that the father usually won. After years of tutelage the son felt he was on the verge of becoming a peer with his father. That morning as his father dipped the net under his son's beautiful fish the son was ecstatic as he proclaimed, "Now I'm level with you Pop and am ready to pass you by." And in a perfectly timed response the father replied, "Not so fast Son, I may have taught you everything you know, but I didn't teach you everything I know."

Unlike our father/son fishing duo, there is no competition between Jesus and his Father. Jesus says in one place, "The Father and I are one" (John 10:30) and here

today we learn that Jesus has passed on that heavenly knowledge to his disciples. What makes them one is their love for one another.

Recognizing that their relationships are about to change, Jesus tells them that he no longer views them as disciples, or followers, or even students, but instead he calls them “friends”.

One church has traditionally adopted the moniker, “Friends Church” but is better known to you and me as the Quakers. Have you ever wondered if you and Jesus are friends? If you grew up in the Episcopal Church, probably not, meaning you probably haven’t asked the question.

In my college religion course at Sewanee, a thoroughly Episcopal center of learning, our Professor, whom I later learned was an ordained priest of this church, would go to great lengths to impress upon us two things: the first was that the King James Version was the proper translation for reading Holy Writ. Second, Jesus was not our friend, our co-pilot, or even our pilot but rather the very airplane in which we sat. His theology was rather exalted. As over the top as

he sounded, he was right in line with the Episcopal trend, past and present, with regards to our general view of Jesus.

We do pretty well in teaching about God Almighty, the baby Jesus at Christmas, but not so great with the concept of Jesus as our friend. “What a friend we have in Jesus” has often been left out of our hymnody with the idea that the lyrics were too sentimental; they brought God down to our level rather than the other way around. I see that point of view but disagree with it. Jesus himself tells us directly that our status has changed. “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends” (John 15:14). Jesus is of course referencing to the life he is about to lay down for his friends, past and present company included.

We can reciprocate the friendship if we follow through on his “commandment, that we love one another as Jesus has loved us” (John 15:12). We need not delay our actions for want of knowledge or password or secret signal. We already possess everything we need to follow through on our friendship with Jesus. I suspect the hang-up on this friendship with Jesus is not so much the concept as it is in the execution of the plan. It’s perfectly nice for us to pay the toll for a stranger who may be next in line at the tollbooth (*Synthesis*, May 6, 2018, p. 4).

It's a lovely act of kindness, but it sits in isolation if the rest of our day is filled with less loving behavior with the people we already know- the ones whose weaknesses and frailties we are already aware of.

The follow-through on friendship with Jesus takes us to another very important word concept in this reading- abide. A friendship that abides is one of devotion and self-denying love that brings a distinct joy. And this is what Jesus wants for us- joy. Jesus wants our joy to be complete.

One of my favorite hymns, "Abide with me" is not often sung at morning services because it starts like this, "Abide with me, fast falls the eventide". The text clearly betrays a person in a struggle who is comforted by his friendship with Jesus. For years I suspected it was written by someone recovering from some sort of addiction, but I recently learned it was about a person struggling with tuberculosis. The Rev. Henry Francis Lyte, also author of "Praise My Soul the King of Heaven", penned "Abide With Me" in the last months of his life as health declined. Yet everyone who knew him attested to his unfailing good cheer. Lyte was friends with Jesus and it was an inspiration to those around him.

When we see our relationship with Jesus as one of deep friendship, we are taking an important step in securing our joy. Amen.