
Jesus is My Friend

A sermon by Canon Lauren Holder
Easter 6 – Year B

If you're over the age of twenty, you've likely had an experience similar to the one I'm about to describe. Your best childhood friend is getting married, and you go to the wedding. Chances are, you're even in the wedding party. At some point you run into the mother of said friend, who is elated to see you. You say, "Mrs. Smith!" and give her a hug. She pulls away from you and says with all sincerity, "Honey, you're an adult now. Call me Jane."

Incredulous, you think, 'I couldn't possibly call this woman Jane! She used to cut the edges off my peanut butter and jelly sandwiches! She had to tell my parents that one time I cussed in Sunday School. She caught us sneaking out in high school... I could never in a million years call Mrs. Smith just Jane.'

If you know anything about long distance running, you know the name Meb Keflezighi. But just in case Meb isn't a household name where you live, I'll tell you he's an Olympic marathoner, and he won the NYC Marathon in 2009 and the Boston Marathon in 2014, the year after the Boston bombing. In the world of running, Meb is a celebrity not just because of his achievements, but because of his humility. If you ever see Meb after a race, I guarantee you the first words out of his mouth will be, "how was your race?" You could be the last person to cross the finish line, and Meb will ask with all sincerity, "how was your race?"

In both these examples, we are taken aback by the esteem and the worthiness Mrs. Smith or Meb bestows upon us. You may still feel like a kid in Mrs. Smith's presence, but then she says "call me Jane" and you begin to see in yourself what she already sees in you—an adult. Or you may feel like the slowest hobby jogger next to Meb, and then he asks, "how was your race?" and you begin to see in yourself the runner he already recognizes in you.

Jesus says to his disciples, "I do not call you servants any longer... but I have called you friends." Friends! And I can just imagine the disciples' response, "But rabbi, you are the Messiah!!" And Jesus goes on, "You did not choose me but I chose you." And I imagine the disciples looking at themselves and beginning to see that which Jesus already sees in them. I imagine them standing a little taller, feet a little more grounded, shoulders a little lighter, head held a little higher. 'Friend, me?'

And Jesus goes on, saying it is the job of the disciples to bear fruit and to love one other as he has commanded them to do.

It's interesting to note that loving one another as Christ has loved us is "the great commandment" in John's gospel. In the synoptic gospels, we get the familiar, "Love the Lord with all your heart, mind and soul; and love your neighbor as yourself." But in John's gospel, the greatest commandment is condensed even further: that you love one another as I have loved you.

It's a simple command, but it's not an easy command. It gives meaning to all that Jesus has done in John's gospel—this is the reason that the Word became flesh! God came to dwell among us so that we would see in Jesus how to love one another, how to be in relationship, how to be friends. And here in this passage, Jesus knows he won't be with the disciples much longer. He knows that this work of loving people selflessly, of introducing people to God through the sheer force of love, that that task is going to fall to this motley crew. And so he calls them friends. He calls them friends not just to make them feel better about themselves, but to call out in them the potential they were created with—the potential we are all

created with as children of God to love one another selflessly, radically, deeply, truly.

Friends, I want us to take this gospel message home with us today, and to hear Jesus' words as if he is sitting in this room talking to us in every moment. To hear Jesus say to you and to me, "I do not call you servants any longer... but I have called you friends. You did not choose me, but I chose you. I'm appointing you to bear fruit, that you may love one another." Hear those words from Jesus and stand a little taller. Begin to see in yourself what Christ sees in you. Use that self-knowledge to embolden you in your love. Be courageous in your love for one another. And then look for opportunities to be that same voice of empowering and encouraging love in someone else's life.

Because loving others as Christ loved us is as simple as it is hard. And we are all friends of Jesus.

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