

To be a friend of Christ is to know the mind of God, because Jesus is the living manifestation, the perfect expression in human form of what the Father desires and intends for us all.

St. John says, “If we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us.” By our obedience to His commandment we are drawn into the life of Christ, and by being drawn into His life we are drawn into the life of God.

We become friends of the King. We have access to Him at any time. We need no special invitation to join Him at his table. We may sit with Him in silence and enjoy His company. We may ask for anything we need, and be confident that we will receive it. That is the relationship that Jesus offers us and desires to have with us. And so He says, “You are my friends if you do what I command you.”

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St. David’s Anglican Church
Charlottesville, Virginia

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¹ This sermon was originally written on the Gospel for Holy Communion on the Sixth Sunday of Easter (the Fifth Sunday after Easter), Year B, according to the Revised Three-Year Common Lectionary, 2006.

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³ *The Table of Lessons*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER xxxiii (Anglican Church of Canada 1962).

⁴ Jeremiah 36:1-26 (KJV).

⁵ St. John 15:1-16 (KJV).

⁶ St. John 15:14 (RSV).

SERMON FOR EVENING PRAYER

The Fifth Sunday after Trinity¹

The Rev. Warren E. Shaw, Priest Associate²

Lessons:³

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the thirty-sixth Chapter of the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah.⁴

“And it came to pass in the fourth year of Jehoiakim [*dg~~eh~~-HOY-ah-kim*] the son of Josiah [*dg~~oe~~-SIGH-uh*] king of Judah, that this word came unto Jeremiah from the LORD, saying, Take thee a roll of a book, and write therein all the words that I have spoken unto thee against Israel, and against Judah, and against all the nations, from the day I spake unto thee, from the days of Josiah [*dg~~oe~~-SIGH-uh*], even unto this day. It may be that the house of Judah will hear all the evil which I purpose to do unto them; that they may return every man from his evil way; that I may forgive their iniquity and their sin. Then Jeremiah called Baruch [*BAH-rouk*] the son of Neriah [*nih-RYE-uh*]: and Baruch [*BAH-rouk*] wrote from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the LORD, which he had spoken unto him, upon a roll of a book. And Jeremiah commanded Baruch [*BAH-rouk*], saying, I am shut up; I cannot go into the house of the LORD: Therefore go thou, and read in the roll, which thou hast written from my mouth, the words of the LORD in the ears of the people in the LORD’s house upon the fasting day: and also thou shalt read them in the ears of all Judah that come out of their cities. It may be they will present their supplication before the LORD, and will return every one from his evil way: for great is the anger and the fury that the LORD hath pronounced against this people. And Baruch [*BAH-rouk*] the son of Neriah [*nih-RYE-uh*] did according to all that Jeremiah the prophet commanded him, reading in the book the words of the LORD in the LORD’s house. And it came to pass in the fifth year of Jehoiakim [*dg~~eh~~-HOY-ah-kim*] the son of Josiah [*dg~~oe~~-SIGH-uh*] king of Judah, in the ninth

month, that they proclaimed a fast before the LORD to all the people in Jerusalem, and to all the people that came from the cities of Judah unto Jerusalem. Then read Baruch [BAH-rouk] in the book the words of Jeremiah in the house of the LORD, in the chamber of Gemariah [gem-uh-RYE-uh] the son of Shaphan [SHAY-fan] the scribe, in the higher court, at the entry of the new gate of the LORD's house, in the ears of all the people.

“When Michaiah [my-KYE-uh] the son of Gemariah [gem-uh-RYE-uh], the son of Shaphan [SHAY-fan], had heard out of the book all the words of the LORD, Then he went down into the king's house, into the scribe's chamber: and, lo, all the princes sat there, even Elishama [ih-LISH-ih-muh] the scribe, and Delaiah [dih-LIE-uh] the son of She-maiah [shih-MAY-uh], and Elnathan [el-NAY-thun] the son of Achbor [ACK-bawr], and Gemariah [gem-uh-RYE-uh] the son of Shaphan [SHAY-fan], and Zedekiah [zed-ih-KYE-uh] the son of Hananiah [han-uh-NYE-uh], and all the princes. Then Michaiah [my-KYE-uh] declared unto them all the words that he had heard, when Baruch [BAH-rouk] read the book in the ears of the people. Therefore all the princes sent Jehudi [dgiH-HYOU-die] the son of Nethaniah [neth-uh-NYE-uh], the son of Shelemiah [shell-uh-MY-uh], the son of Cushi [KYOU-shy], unto Baruch [BAH-rouk], saying, Take in thine hand the roll wherein thou hast read in the ears of the people, and come. So Baruch [BAH-rouk] the son of Neriah [nih-RYE-uh] took the roll in his hand, and came unto them. And they said unto him, Sit down now, and read it in our ears. So Baruch [BAH-rouk] read it in their ears. Now it came to pass, when they had heard all the words, they were afraid both one and other, and said unto Baruch [BAH-rouk], We will surely tell the king of all these words. And they asked Baruch [BAH-rouk], saying, Tell us now, How didst thou write all these words at his mouth? Then Baruch [BAH-rouk] answered them, He pronounced all these words unto me with his mouth, and I wrote them with ink in the book. Then said the

to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.”

St. James says, “Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed.”

St. Peter says, “Have unity of spirit, sympathy, love of the brethren, a tender heart and a humble mind. Do not return evil for evil or reviling for reviling; but on the contrary bless, for to this you have been called that you may obtain a blessing.”

St. Paul says, “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

These are all apostolic elaborations of Our Lord's commandment.

We are able to treat each other that way, or should be able to, because we are all under the authority of the same Lord. We acknowledge the same duty. We are led by the same Spirit. We have similar experiences and similar values. If that were not true it would be very difficult to be friends with each other. We would have very little to say to each other and would probably not be very comfortable in each other's presence.

Conclusion:

But Jesus calls us to friendship with each other by inviting us to friendship with Himself. He says to His disciples, “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.”

know what your friend is really like. You know her philosophy of life. You know what he likes and does not like. You know how she thinks. You know his moral standards. You know what motivates her. You know his plans and his dreams, her hopes and her fears. You know the private *persona* that is behind the public *persona*. You know his faults, but you like him anyway. That is what it means to have a friend.

There is a great hunger in the world today for that kind of intimacy. Unfortunately, people today tend to think of intimacy in terms of sex. So when the Bible says that the heart of Jonathan was knit to the heart of David, and that David loved Jonathan as he loved his own soul, there are those who interpret that to mean that the two men were homosexually involved with each other. Definitely an unwarranted assumption.

Some people think, wrongly I hasten to add, that sex will produce intimacy. That is one reason people engage in sexual activity before marriage. It is also why there is such pressure in our day for homosexually oriented people to receive approval for engaging in genital sex. In so many cases it is really the intimacy that people want, and the sex is wrongly seen as a necessary component of it.

On the other hand, there are those who shy away from intimacy. They refuse to share experiences or hopes or fears or any other really personal material. They keep their thoughts and their feelings to themselves and hold everyone at a safe psychological distance. In other words, they have no friends, and tend to be very lonely.

The apostolic writers, when they talk about the Church, invariably emphasize both intimacy and chastity among the faithful. The author of Hebrews says, "Let brotherly love continue.... Let marriage be held in honor among all, and let the marriage bed be undefiled.... Do not neglect

princes unto Baruch [**BAH-rouk**], Go, hide thee, thou and Jeremiah; and let no man know where ye be.

"And they went in to the king into the court, but they laid up the roll in the chamber of Elishama [**ih-LISH-ih-muh**] the scribe, and told all the words in the ears of the king. So the king sent Jehudi [**dgih-HYOU-die**] to fetch the roll: and he took it out of Elishama [**ih-LISH-ih-muh**] the scribe's chamber. And Jehudi [**dgih-HYOU-die**] read it in the ears of the king, and in the ears of all the princes which stood beside the king. Now the king sat in the winterhouse in the ninth month: and there was a fire on the hearth burning before him. And it came to pass, that when Jehudi [**dgih-HYOU-die**] had read three or four leaves, he cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth. Yet they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, neither the king, nor any of his servants that heard all these words. Nevertheless Elnathan [**el-NAY-thun**] and Delaiah [**dih-LIE-uh**] and Gemariah [**gem-uh-RYE-uh**] had made intercession to the king that he would not burn the roll: but he would not hear them. But the king commanded Jerahmeel [**dgih-RAH-mih-ell**] the son of Hammelech [**HAM-uh-leck**], and Seraiah [**sih-RYE-uh**] the son of Azriel [**AZ-rih-ell**], and Shelemiah [**shell-uh-MY-uh**] the son of Abdeel [**AB-dih-ell**], to take Baruch [**BAH-rouk**] the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet: but the LORD hid them."

Here endeth the First Lesson.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fifteenth Chapter of the Gospel according to St. John.⁵

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit. Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide

in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you. Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples. As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full. This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the Second Lesson: “You are my friends if you do what I command you.”⁶ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Homily:

In an ancient oriental kingdom there was a very special class of people known as “the friends of the king.”

These people were on the most intimate terms with the king, and enjoyed privileges that most people could hardly conceive of.

They had the full freedom of the palace and all its resources. They had access to the king at any hour of the day or night without an appointment. They could dine at his table whenever they wanted without an invitation. The friends of the king could enter the royal bedroom first thing in the morning and join the king for breakfast. The king would listen to them, enjoy their company, and grant them special favors and requests.

Such is the status that Jesus offers to all those who acknowledge His kingship and obey His commands.

Not everyone enjoys this relationship with Jesus because not everyone acknowledges who He is. Those who acknowledge that He is the incarnation of God are those who obey His commandment. And what does He command us? Listen to His words: “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”

And how is it that Jesus has loved us? He has loved us in spite of our sins and with full knowledge of our many shortcomings and faults. He has loved us when we have failed to return His love. He has loved us when our behavior has been totally unacceptable to Him. He will not accept our sinful behavior, and He will not allow us to settle for anything less than a full and true reflection of the nature of God. Nevertheless, Jesus has loved us to the point of laying down His life for us. Such is the friendship that He offers us, and such is the friendship He requires of us with respect to each other.

Friendship, of course, means more than just access and more than just acceptance. Friendship means intimacy. It means sharing secrets. True friendship means that you