SACRIFICIAL FRIENDSHIP

Rev. Dawn Flynn
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Scripture – John 15:9-17.

Everyone wants to have friends. As children we learn that in order to have friends, we must be a friend to others. We learn being a friend means to care for someone and desire the best for them, laughing with them, crying with them, and sharing our toys with them. Also, as children we learned that some of our best friends had four legs instead of two.

It seems Cheri, a first grader, was having trouble adjusting to school. Mrs. Edwards called her into her office for a chat, confident that her many years of training as a guidance counselor had more than prepared her to handle the situation. “Cheri”, she said, “I want to be your friend. I will never tell your mommy or daddy or your teacher anything we talk about if you don’t want me to. I want you to know that you can always trust me.” With tearful eyes, she looked up and replied, “Gee, Mrs. Edwards, you’re just like my dog.”

Even though Webster defines a ‘friend’ as ‘a person whom one knows well and is fond of”, I believe that Buttons, or Mr. B, a mixed retriever, was one of my best friends. I remember fondly our times running outside and him sitting in the passenger’s seat of my car, looking at me with eyes that swelled with love. It brings tears to my eyes just thinking about how special he was. I don’t remember but I’m sure I talked to Mr. B and probably shared some of my deepest dreams with him. I knew I could because, like Cheri knew with Mrs. Edwards, that my secrets were safe with him. For a friend was someone you could tell your secrets to and, because Mr. B couldn’t talk, I knew that they were safe.

Each of us have had good friends. Friends that we have known during our life that we think of very fondly. Friends that we currently have that we share our lives with. Maybe those closest friends are our partners. Maybe our close friends aren’t our family at all. Whichever they are, they enrich our lives because of who they are. Some of us have been blessed to have or have had a very special friend. That is, one to whom we have bonded so deeply that we would have given our very life to protect them. A friend who makes us feel complete when we are in their presence.

While growing up we quickly discover who our true friends were when we got into trouble. Our true friends stuck by us through thick and thin. Our fly by night friends would scatter when the heat was on. Like Webster’s definition says, a true friend knows you well. Proverbs 17:17 says, “A friend loves at all times.” They know who you are deep down. They know what kind of stuff you’re made of and admire you for it. They love you when you’re unlovable. They also know that if hard times were to fall on them, that you would be there to help and be a friend to them. A true friend says ‘I love and I care about you so much that no matter the situation or the circumstances, I will always be there for you.’

That’s the kind of friend Jesus is. Jesus said in John 15:13, “Greater love has no one than this that someone lay down their life for their friend.”

James Hewitt relates a story about a soldier who asked his commanding officer if he might go out into the “No Man’s Land” between the trenches in World War I to bring in one of his comrades who lay grievously wounded. “You can go,” said the officer, “but it’s not worth it. Your friend is probably killed, and you will throw your own life away.” But the man went. Somehow, he managed to get his friend, hoist him onto his shoulder, and bring him back to the trenches. The officer looked very tenderly on the would-be rescuer, and then he said, “I told you it wouldn’t be worth it. Your friend is dead and you are mortally wounded.” “It was worth it, though, sir,” he said. “How do you mean, ‘worth it’? I tell you your friend is dead.” “Yes, sir,” the boy answered, “but it was worth it, because when I got to him he was still alive, and he said to me, ‘Jim, I knew you’d come.”

This soldier’s willingness to sacrifice his life for his friend is the kind of love that Jesus was talking about in John 15. Jesus doesn’t care what the circumstances are. Jesus cares about our well-being. I Peter 3:18 says, “For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive in the spirit”. Jesus loved us so much that He was willing to give up everything in heaven to come down to earth to die for our sins to bring us back to God. He was willing to lay down His life for His friends. He was willing to lay down His life for you and for me. And in so doing, not only became our sacrifice on the cross, but also defined for us true friendship.

True friendship is to be like Jesus. True friendship is to have sacrificial friendship and love so much as to be willing to give everything for another person’s well-being. True friendship is not only being like Jesus to others, but it is also loving Jesus with all that we are. We can have no truer friend than Jesus. Jesus deserves our complete devotion and trust.

We can come to Him with all of our problems and know that He will listen to us and will do what is best for us. That is especially comforting during these uncertain times of the Covid pandemic.

We know that no matter what we have done, Jesus will always love us for He knows us better than we know ourselves.

We need to continually approach His throne of grace in prayer. How often do we come to His throne in prayer each day other than at mealtime? Once? Twice? I venture to say there are days when each one of us doesn’t approach Him in prayer once during the day except for meal times. Oh, how we limit His power and blessings because we can’t find time to let Him be our friend.

The song ‘What a Friend We Have in Jesus’ says it so clearly:

What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry everything to God in prayer.

Have we trials and temptations? Is there trouble anywhere?
We should never be discouraged; take it to the Lord in prayer.
Can we find a friend so faithful who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness; take it to the Lord in prayer.

Are we weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care?
Precious Savior, still our refuge; take it to the Lord in prayer.
Do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer!
In his arms he’ll take and shield thee; thou wilt find a solace there.

The words in this song I believe were inspired by the Holy Spirit so God could use it to encourage and comfort us. They are very special words for you and me on this day. They are telling us that Jesus is our very best friend and doesn’t want us to suffer needlessly. Do you believe that? We need to ask ourselves ‘Is Jesus our best friend?’

n Jesus Name. Amen.