

Most of us spend most of our time sorting out our personal lives, our little trials, sagas, victories, and defeats. At the end of the day we tote up our score, not for or against the great social or organized systems of the world, but in terms of how we stand with the people we value, and perhaps even love.

It is easy for religion to pronounce upon the great affairs and events of our time; it can and it must do so. But a religion that cannot help us sort out our daily dose of human experience is of no earthly good.

The first gift given to us at creation is the gift of friendship. “It is not good that man should be alone,” says God before providing Adam with Eve. The motivation is charitable. God does not say that it is not practical or convenient for man to be alone. God says, simply, that it is not good. God remedies the matter by providing the first relationship for the sake of companionship.

Adam’s need is our need. We need to find ourselves connected to someone other than ourselves. Yes, we are connected to God our creator. We have that ultimate relationship and we bear the mark of the maker. But even God recognized that that is not enough. God has

given us the gift of friendship as a sign of the intimacy God shares with us.

Friendship is a treasure. True friendship is hard to find, like a treasure. True friendship comes from God. Friendship is so valuable. It is no surprise that friendship can be a source of trouble. We humans, with all our foibles, can manage to mess up that which is so important to us.

We know the rules- to have a friend is to be a friend. A friend in need is a friend indeed. We pursue friendship carefully; looking for the friend who will support, comfort, and encourage us despite ourselves. Yet we pursue friendship despite that fact that it can be difficult to achieve.

We learn that we need to keep these valued friendships “in repair.” Repair is an important notion when it comes to friendship. Anyone of you who maintain property know how difficult it is to do so. It takes daily, weekly, and annual chores to keep things going; not to mention the large occasional projects. So, it is in friendship.

I have a friend with whom I was very close when we were in our teens and twenties. As we pursued separate paths, I would call him to check in on a regular basis. After a few years of that, it dawned on me that I always called him and he never called me. I decided that the effort was all one way and stopped calling him. I still see him maybe

once a year and still enjoy the heck out of him, but the sense of close friendship is gone.

Around a year ago, I lost my beloved cousin, Gloria. I was in the early stages of grief. I decided I needed a dose of my best friend, Eddie. He is the medical director of a large clinic on the south shore. He also carries a full patient load. He also helps his wife run her art gallery in South Boston. Then there is his life as brother, dad, and granddad. When I contacted him to get together, without hesitation, he cleared room in his ferocious schedule in order to have a dinner with me. I spoke of Gloria for a while but mostly it was us just lapsing into our comfortable conversation. That dose of friendship was an important step in my dealing with my loss. There is nothing quite like a true friend.

As I was writing this sermon, I of course, reflected upon the friendships in my life. I called my cousin Jeannie and told her about this sermon. I said to her that I wanted her view on this, but I think she and I have evolved into true friendship and well beyond cousins who enjoy being around each other. She fully agreed. We work to find time together. We are there for each other when times are tough, and believe me, there have been plenty of tough times. We are close friends.

In the conversation, she told me about when her husband and dad were approaching their own deaths. Her dad, who enjoyed much

financial success, said to his son-in-law, “When you near the end of your life and reflect upon it, if you can count a few good friends that you know you can count on, you have lived a rich life.” I don’t plan to die soon, but I can proudly say that by my Uncle Dick’s standards, I have lived a rich life.

Christians know, or should know, that our only great expectations are in God. For the rest, life comes with no guarantees except the necessity of effort. There are ideals to which we should and must cling: loyalty, trust, truth, love, joy. They are ideals, but they serve to sustain us.

We have God to guide us in these ideals. God allows for failure and forgiveness, for hope arising out of disappointment, and for charity, the lubricant of all relationships worth having.

Friendship is based upon a sense of security and loyalty. Its hallmark is trustworthiness earned over the long haul. It is the long haul that tests our capacity for friendship. Our relationship with God is the ultimate security and loyalty. In the meantime, we have much work to do and many joys to experience, much sorrow to know, and great hope to keep in our pilgrimage of friendship.

C, Raymond Beran wrote this piece called:

What is a friend?

What is a friend? I will tell you.

It is a person with whom you dare to be yourself.

Your soul can be naked with him.

He seems to ask of you to put on nothing, only to be what you are.

He does not want you to be better or worse.

When you are with him, you feel as a prisoner feels who has been
declared innocent.

You do not have to be on your guard.

You can say what you think, as long as it is genuinely you.

He understands those contradictions in your nature that leads
others to miss judge you.

With him you breath freely.

You can avow your little vanities and envies and hates and vicious
sparks, your meannesses, and absurdities and, in opening them up to
him, they are lost, dissolved on the white ocean of his loyalty.

He understands.

You do not have to be careful.

You can abuse him, neglect him, tolerate him.

Best of all, you can keep still with him.

It makes no matter.

He likes you-he is like fire that purges to the bone.

He understands; he understands.

You can weep with him, sin with him, laugh with him, pray with
him.

Through it all-and underneath-he sees, knows, and loves you.

A friend? What is a friend?

Just one, I repeat, with whom you dare to be yourself.

AMEN