

Sixth Sunday of Easter 2018
Acts 10.25-26, 34-35, 44-48//1 John 4.7-10//John 15.9-17

→about two months ago the Prime Minister for Great Britain announced the formation of a new cabinet level appointment...the Minister of Loneliness.

→this new appointment was in response to a study within the United Kingdom revealing that over 9 million people in the U.K. suffer from chronic or continuous loneliness.

→according to the British government study.... 200,000 elderly people in the country go for months without any meaningful conversations with family or friends

→and half of the people in the country who are over 75 years old live alone

→as a result over 85% of elderly adults report feeling lonely

→in a statement announcing this new position, Prime Minister Theresa May said, *“for far too many people...loneliness is the sad reality of modern life. I want to confront this challenge for our society and ask that all of us take some action to address the loneliness endured by so many people...people who have no one with whom to talk to or share their thoughts or experiences.”*

→likewise here in this country....more than one-third of us report feeling lonely....

→recent research has even linked this epidemic of loneliness to some instances of causing an early death...

→in 2017 a groundbreaking study pointed to two important conclusions --- greater social connection and interaction among people was associated with a 50% reduced risk of dying early...AND the sense of loneliness had an effect on the risk of dying younger equal to that of obesity or smoking five cigarettes a day...

→the conclusion being that many of us are literally dying of loneliness these days

PAUSE

→apparently we are wired...we have been created for relationships and social contact and interaction...and without it our mental and physical health can readily deteriorate...

→and so perhaps that is why so many have turned to a variety of different ways and are desperate to find a way to combat their loneliness and isolation

→could the rise of Facebook and Twitter really be a way for us to satisfy this hunger to find and network with others so as to combat our loneliness?

→and yet even with Facebook and Twitter...and all the other so called “social media” platforms...there still a vast group of people who go home at night still feeling desperately alone

PAUSE

→the point of all this being...is that we all need friends...we all want friends...and we all want to feel connected to someone...

→we were not created to be loners...as God said when he created Adam...and put him a garden paradise filled with all the animals and plants living in perfect harmony... *“it is not good for humans to be alone...I will create a partner for him.”*

→and today...in the gospel Jesus continues this desire when he says to his disciples and you and me...*you are my friends...I no longer call you slaves...[but rather] I call you friends.*

→[you know] quite often...those lines are glossed over when we hear this reading...

→in fact...most usually because of the selection of passages for this Sunday....the focus tends to be more on the theme of “love”

→our second reading for the first letter of Saint John...urges us to “love one another...because love is of God and everyone who loves is begotten of God”...

→and likewise...in the gospel reading Jesus tells us to “remain in my love...as the Father loves me, so I also love you...this is my command: love one another.”

→however in the midst of all this...Jesus recognizes the human need for friends...real genuine friends...

→and so as he gathers his disciples on that last evening he will spend with them...he tells them from this point forward that they will be his friends...not servants, not slaves, not students, not even disciples...but his friends.

→I wonder how that must have sounded to the disciples to hear their master and Lord call them friends....

→was it jarring...too good to be true...or were they humbled and overwhelmed by this gesture?

PAUSE

→ “from now on I call you my friends”...Jesus said on the last night of his earthly life

→as undeserved as it is...as overwhelming as it might be....this is exactly what disciples and you and I need the most in our lives...

→because what truly is a friend....

→a friend is someone who has your back...who knows you and cares for you...

→a friend is someone who guards your secrets and shares your deepest joy and sorrows

→a friend is someone you can call upon no matter what the hour it might be without having to apologize.

→a friend is someone who watches out for you...who knows you and accepts you for who you are....

→and if you are lucky...perhaps you may have someone just like that in your life...may be one other person...or two or three...

→if so, **you are truly blessed**

→and how much blessed are we... to know that those of us who follow and know Jesus Christ also have a friend in him...

And what a friend Jesus truly is to us indeed