



Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. **AMEN**

Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed!

Once upon a time there was a middle school English teacher who asked her class to write a sentence defining “friend”. She was not expecting the imaginative definitions she received. Guess she was a good teacher. Here is some of what her students wrote: “A friend is a pair of open arms in a society of armless people.” “A friend gives you a blanket on a cold winter night.” “A friend is a large cappuccino on a damp day.” And this one really shocked her, as these students were 12 to 13 years old. “A friend is a stiff drink when you had a terrible shock.” Some lovely thoughts, wouldn’t you say? What is a friend to you? Mark Twain said, “The holy passion of friendship is of so sweet and steady and loyal and enduring a nature that it will last through a whole lifetime if not asked to lend money!” Yes, with some caveats, friends can be a wonderful thing.

I think it is true that women generally have more friends than men. I read somewhere this week that 60% of men over 30 cannot identify a single person they would call a close friend. Women on the other hand can probably name 5 or 6 women that they would call close friends. Friendships are however, not easy to develop.

In our Gospel reading from John for today, in verse 13 Jesus says, “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends”. Jesus is again foreshadowing his death for the disciples. He uses these words to show them the meaning of what is going to happen to him. And to clear things up, Jesus goes on to tell them, “You are my friends if you do what I command you.” The disciples are not His servants, but rather Jesus calls them friends as He has made known to them everything that the Father has told Him. I would suspect

that only after the resurrection would they finally understand the significance of these words. Jesus' love will require him to go to the cross, for His friends.

This idea of laying down one's life for his friends has value in the Greco-Roman world, as people placed a high priority or value on friendship. In fact there were instances in which it was necessary to sacrifice a life on behalf of a friend. And Jesus' willingness to sacrifice his life for the sins of the world is an example of this value of friendship. And just as Jesus sacrificed for us; we hear his command to love one another as he has loved us. This would be our sacrificial act. Jesus here is talking about a love that sacrifices, a love in action, a love that pays the price.

We remember the story of Peter telling Jesus that he would lay down his life for him. But when the time came, Peter denied Jesus not once but three times. Talk is cheap and love is costly. When we hear of love in the New Testament, we think of *Agape*, the love that is characterized by concern for the welfare of the other person or *Philos*, the compassionate brotherly love. These loves are used pretty much interchangeably in the Scriptures. This sort of love requires that we act in behalf of the other person, demonstrating love in a practical way. An agape person will do what is possible to feed the hungry, give a cup of cold water to the thirsty, clothe the naked, welcome the stranger and visit the sick and imprisoned. The agape person has little or nothing to gain by helping these hungry, thirsty, naked, strange or sick people. Agape love is centered on giving not getting.

Agape love is what Jesus demonstrated to His friends. This is also, the love of which Jesus speaks when he tells us to love one another as He loved us. That is our command. That is what Jesus is talking about when he said we will be friends if we do what he commands, what he asks. To love one another as he loved us, to be a friend of Jesus we must be a friend to his other friends. But we all know that it is not usually as simple as that.

Our society today does not know love in the same way. Agape love is different from that of our culture. Love, for many today, is the satisfaction of one's own needs rather than satisfying the needs of others. Today, "I Love You" often means "I Want You". And this is a slippery slope that can lead to manipulation and possessive actions. Getting instead of giving for sure.

I know that I have had people ask me why I spend so much time working at and for the Lord's Cupboard. It is my agape, my way of loving my neighbor, feeding those that are food insecure in our community. As a congregation we

are involved in many ways that show our love of community. From giving up our parking lot for the Farmer's Market on Wednesdays to making quilts that get distributed by Lutheran World Relief. Offering a place for AA and a grief support group to meet as well as supporting local ministries with our benevolence dollars. All these things show we are friends to those in need.

Agape love is an active love that wants nothing in return. Its actions are what Jesus commands us to, because we are called His friends. When we are friends to others, Jesus too calls us His friends. And folks this is not works righteousness. It is a response to the love of God in Christ Jesus.

And that brings me to another important point in our Scripture text for this morning. In verse 16 Jesus says, "You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another." Wow, did you hear that. Jesus chose us. In the beginning of creation Jesus was there with the Father creating us to be His children. And that has never changed. Jesus chooses us; over and over again to not only love one another but to love God.

What a packed text for this morning. And what good news. Jesus is our friend. In fact as I was writing this message, I thought it would have been a good idea to have chosen the old old song, "What a friend we have in Jesus". In the second verse the song goes, "Can we find a friend so faithful?" And folks the answer is yes. Jesus is the best friend you will ever have. He is the one who gave his life for you on the cross. He did this as your friend, to give you forgiveness, abundant life and the promise of life eternal. God chose you to give these amazing gracious gifts too. How blessed are we! Even though we are ordinary people, God chooses us. We are chosen certainly not because we are great, but because the one who empowers us is great. God chooses whom he chooses. God empowers whom God empowers. And we are important to the Lord, not because any of us were class valedictorians, not because any of us were rich business owners, and not because any of us are superstar athletes, but because we have given God our hearts.

And because we have Jesus as our friend, Jesus in our hearts we are appointed to go out and bear fruit, fruit of the vine. Jesus does not clarify what that fruit will be, but he said it would last. We have all been given different talents, gifts to serve our friends, our neighbors in different ways. From this showing of

love for one another we receive joy. And it promises to be a joy everlasting.
Truly this day, we have read a gospel of good news. **AMEN**

Christ has risen! He has risen indeed!