

# **“Friendship”**

## **August 14, 2011**

### **Grove Presbyterian Church**

**New Testament Lesson**

**Acts 27: 1-8**

**When it was decided that we were to sail for Italy, they transferred Paul and some other prisoners to a centurion of the Augustan Cohort, named Julius. Embarking on a ship of Adramyttium that was about to set sail to the ports along the coast of Asia, we put to sea, accompanied by Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica. The next day we put in at Sidon; and Julius treated Paul kindly, and allowed him to go to his friends to be cared for. Putting out to sea from there, we sailed under the lee of Cyprus, because the winds were against us. After we had sailed across the sea that is off Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra in Lycia. There the centurion found an Alexandrian ship bound for Italy and put us on board. We sailed slowly for a number of days and arrived with difficulty off Cnidus, and as the wind was against us, we sailed under the lee of Crete off Salmone. Sailing past it with difficulty, we came to a place called Fair Havens, near the city of Lasea.**

Tough to find a song about friendship. Easy about Eros, romance. But friendship?

- James Taylor: “You’ve Got a Friend.”
- Bill Withers: “Lean on Me”
- Beatles: “With a Little Help from My Friends”

The importance of great best friends, which transcends family bonds, more a spiritual bond than bond of blood.

- ▲ Jonathan and David.
- ▲ Hawkeye and Chingachgook
- ▲ Enkidu and Gilgamesh.
- ▲ Rick and Louis Renault: “I think this is the beginning of a beautiful friendship.”
- ▲ J.R.R. Tolkien and his fellow Inkling: C.S. Lewis. For that matter, considering Tolkien and Lewis, we lift up the fast friendship between Frodo and Sam: “Come on, Mr. Frodo. I can't carry it for you... but I can carry you!”

Lewis, enamored with the heroic legends of the past, lamented that friendship is largely ignored by the modern world.

Lewis himself wrote a lot about friendship as one of the fantastic four forms of love. And pretty useful in romance too. As much as it helps when couples love each other; it is far more important that they like each other. A friend appreciates her for who she is rather than for who he wants her to be.

- ◆ We must do something to merit friendship, Lewis wrote

- ◆ Freely chosen, an act of will, based on common interest: do you see the same truth? As Lewis said, “Friendship is born at that moment when one person says to another, ‘What! You too? I thought I was the only one’”
- ◆ We have friends because we want something else (a shared vision, activity)
- ◆ People who want friends can never make any, the very condition of having friends is that we should want something else besides friends
- ◆ Eros is face to face; friends stand side by side, shoulder to shoulder
- ◆ Eros will have naked bodies; friendship will have naked personalities
- ◆ Last, he said, friendship is “rarely an image under which Scripture represents the love between God and man”

All of this suggests how social media friendships really aren’t. Communication is skin and eyes, smells, tears and laughter. Knowing and being known.

Social media friendships really aren’t.

Emoticons, email, and text-messaging do not qualify as communication. Memos? Yes. Notices? Yes. Useful? At times. Communication? No. Harmful? Often, especially when technology is so conveniently and casually used to attack and hurt others. Social media can bring out the ugly in us.

Rachel Simmons recently updated her book, Odd Girl Out, about how girls can be incredibly cruel toward other girls and how social media has become a nasty, easy, and anonymous way of hurting others. Girls are especially vulnerable and insecure when it comes to use of social media, creating, as she writes, “anxiety, paranoia, aggression.” Which is why she recommends boundaries on cell phone and computer use. Turn them off, she recommends; park them during dinner time, bed time, homework time, while on vacation. Offline time is healthy time. It gives you a chance to discover what real friendships are. Oh yes, and don’t share your password. Say no. Learn how to say no. It’ll come handy.

Which hints at the negatives in friendship love. One reality is how friendship basically is exclusive. But, by definition, it has to be. To say someone is my friend means someone else isn’t and we friends will exclude you. Painful especially for the insecure girl. But, come on, not everyone can be or will be your friend. People who need everyone to be their friend are the most insecure and desperate.

Truly nasty negative is when your exclusive friends are a poisonous, bad lot. Strong friendships exist in those Mexican drug cartels. It explains why friends can so readily gang up on someone else.

Is it a sign of the times, or our culture, or gender, or my memory, that I cannot conjure up famous historical friendships between two females, or for that matter, between male and female? Help me out, here, please. Okay, Thelma and Louise?

Today's clip from the book of Acts, which tells us about the origin of the early church, gives us this picturesque travelogue about Paul and some really quality friends. Paul's friends Luke and Aristarchus join him as voluntary prisoners for the journey from Judea to Rome and there to face Caesar Nero himself.

- ▲ Over 1,000 miles and seven months across sea, zig-zagging from port to port against unfavorable winds, in grain ships smaller than this sanctuary.
- ▲ Nor'westers, tempest tossed, spoiled food supplies, and shipwrecked on Malta
- ▲ More than a seafaring story, it is an allegory of life.

As prisoners, the destination in Rome promises even more hardship and punishment. Shared sufferings. It is what friends do for each other. Friends go with us, even when we have to face our monsters.

Makes one rueful about all my friends. Trying to remember when and how you became friends. How it just happened. Good friends. Last month I performed the wedding for the daughter of an old, old, really old friend, who, even though we might talk once a year would drive here from Connecticut in a split second if I needed him.

Good friends. Lost friends. And those times even when I haven't been as good a friend as I ought. Unreliable friends we have been or hurt by.

Doug and I once were thick as thieves. Bicycling, fishing, sleepovers. But by High School our emerging personalities and interests led us toward other close friends and away from each other. We still were friendly but we were no longer buddies. It happens. Loss of a common interest.

Let's revisit C. S. Lewis' last comment.

- ◆ Friendship is "rarely an image under which Scripture represents the love between God and man"

How true. Consider the typical ways we describe the relationship between God and us humans:

**Father God:** the authoritative, punishing God: "Wait till your father comes home."

**Mother God:** nurturing and comforting and interceding

**King:** no question who's the boss

**Lord of Hosts:** the general leading troops from the front lines, wielding shining sword

**Ancient of Days:** old fellow with long beard, his head stuffed with wisdom

**Shepherd:** with rod and staff the shepherd keeps us silly sheep in line, fed, and safe

But friend? Seldom.

Only several times do we come across this. When Proverbs says how God offers his confidence, his friendship to the upright. When Paul alludes to our friendship to God

restored. When Abram is referred to as the friend of God. Then again when Jesus tells us we no longer are slaves but merit status as his friends, if we do what he commands. Then when Peter affirms he loves Jesus as a good friend.

What does it take to have a friend?

What are the key ingredients of friendship?

- ▲ Friends trust each other
- ▲ Friends make each other better, holding us accountable to what bonds us to each other, this companionship of a common cause, which is why if you lose the common interest you lose the friendship
- ▲ Friends don't try to fix each other
- ▲ Friends want the best for each other without getting jealous when it happens
- ▲ Friends stand by each other, allies against the world
- ▲ Friends stand with naked personalities before each other, honest and authentic; you open yourself up to them; they know you inside out, and still they – he, she -- hang with you, through thick and thin

Pretty refreshing view of God. Here God is no intellectual abstraction but an experience.

Pretty good description of how Jesus treats me. Now, I just need to treat him like my best friend.