



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

1611 E Main St., Watertown, WI 53094

(920)261-2570

A Stephen Ministry Congregation

www.goodshepherdwi.org

Sixth Sunday of Easter

May 6, 2018

“Unequal Friends”

(John 15:13-16)

Rev. David K. Groth

“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you . . .” (John 15:13-16).

Collect: O God, the giver of all that is good, by Your holy inspiration grant that we may think those things that are right and by Your merciful guiding accomplish them; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

Have you ever had an unequal friendship? Have you ever been the one to do most of the giving, most of the inviting, most of the talking and cooking and planning and paying?

I can tell you, at this time in my life, all of my friendships are unequal, and I'm on the receiving end. Grief has a way of making us dull and uninteresting and uninterested. Grief has a way of making us awkward and quiet and fatigued. And there's something very self-centered and distracting about grief. Said another way, there's nothing about grief that is conducive to friendship. Therefore, the unequal friendships! Who wants an uninteresting, awkward, self-centered, distracted slug who's given to crying at odd times and places . . . who wants that as a friend? But thanks be to God my friends have not given up on me. They keep coaxing me out of the house, teasing me out of the shell, distracting me and inviting me. They guilt me into exercising with them, even challenge me with opportunities to serve others rather than fixate on my own loss. One day I trust it'll be better, (it's a little better already) but for now I have nothing but unequal friendships, and I'm so thankful for that. It's a lot better than the alternative.

Unequal friendship: that's the way it's always been between God and me too. I am certainly not his best friend. To the contrary, I'm rude and negligent and poorly behaved and distracted. I embarrass him in public places I'm sure. But I know he remains my friend, (and yours) because I know he is a faithful friend.

Unequal friendships: when Jesus calls us friends, he condescends greatly, but we are lifted high by his friendship.

“Greater love has no one than this” Jesus says in our

text, “that he lay down his life for his friends . . . I have called you friends . . . You did not choose me, but I chose you.”

Jesus said these words on the very night he was betrayed and arrested, the night before his crucifixion. They were at the table for the Last Supper. He knows what’s about to happen. He’s going to be arrested, tried and tortured and finally crucified. But no one is taking his life from him. No, he’s going to lay down his life for his friends.

So he’s saying some important things to the disciples preparing them for the next few days, but also for the rest of their lives, after he ascends into heaven. Scholars call these chapters the “Farewell Discourse” of Jesus. They have a sort of last will and testament quality to them. These words are for his church, his followers in every age. That is, these words are not just for his disciples then, but for you and me today.

“I have called you friends” Jesus said. What remarkable grace that God’s Son should call us friends. After all, what do we have to offer him? We have nothing the Lord could ever need or want, for the “earth is the LORD’s and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it” (Ps. 24:1).

He doesn’t need your gold or silver. If he wants some for some reason, he can make more. He doesn’t need your company, your companionship, your help along the way. He never has a leaky faucet in heaven or a mower that won’t start. Acts 17: “God is not served by human hands, as if he needed anything, because he himself gives all men life and breath and everything else” (v. 25).

Simply put, God does not need you. He doesn’t even need your gratitude, your service, your worship. Psalm 50, “I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. I know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine. If I were hungry I would not tell you” (v.9ff).

God doesn’t need your hands or your feet, your mind,

your soul or your heart. Your neighbors do, but God most certainly does not.

There's a Christmas carol called, "In the Bleak Midwinter." I love it. It's one of my favorites . . . so long as I don't think about it too carefully. That last verse is the offending verse. It goes like this:

“What can I give Him,
Poor as I am?
If I were a Shepherd
I would bring a lamb;
If I were a Wise Man
I would do my part,
Yet what I can give Him,
Give my heart.”

On the surface, it's all very nice. When we're so poor that we have nothing else to give, we can at least give God our hearts. But do you remember what Jesus said about the human heart? "Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander" (Mt. 15: 19). Is that such a nice gift for the Lord Jesus? Martin Luther would call his heart a stinking bag of maggots. Is that such a nice thing to give the Lord? When God calls us sinners his friends, he condescends greatly.

(There are other beautiful Christmas carols that have been absolutely ruined by a seminary education, but that's for a different sermon.)

I have called you friends. God's Word warns us to choose our friends carefully. Paul writes, "Bad company ruins good morals" (1 Cor. 15:33). And Proverbs 22 says, "Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man, lest you learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare" (v. 24). And again from Proverbs 13, "Whoever walks with the wise becomes wise, but the companion of fools will suffer harm" (v. 20).

It's all good advice for us, but the giver of the advice, the Lord, thoroughly disregards it for himself. He makes

friends with bad company. He keeps friends in low places. He becomes the companion of fools, and thus suffers harm. He befriends men and women who are quarrelsome and are given to anger, and in doing so he entangles himself in our snares.

Why did the Lord do it? Why did the Lord become Friend of Sinners? He entangles himself in our mess, our sin, our plight, in order to save us from it. He takes it all on himself and dies our death to free us from sin and death's entanglement. As our Friend, he condescends greatly, even to the point of dying on a cross, in order to lift us up high.

Normally, choosing your friends happens in a balanced way. You express subtle interest and openness. They do the same. You invite them for dinner. They reciprocate. But God's friendship to us is a one way deal. We like to think we had something to do with it, but we didn't. He doesn't love us because we're so loveable. No, it's all grace. In our text he says, "You did not choose me, but I chose you." He chose us as friends, because he knows we desperately need his friendship. He knows his friendship and grace will lead to our everlasting life. It is an unequal friendship of the highest order. He does *all* the giving. We do all the receiving. He pays all the costs, does all the work, and makes all the plans. But he also coaxes us out of our homes, teases us out of our shells, and challenges us to serve others rather than focusing on our grief, our own needs.

In Luke 14, Jesus said, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, those who cannot repay you" (vv. 12-14). In other words, as he has loved us, so we ought to love one another (1 Jn. 4:11). As he has befriended us, we ought to befriend others. I'd like to see every one of us have an unequal friendship, a friendship where you do most of the giving. Make sure it's not just for one meal, or one cup of coffee, a one and done sort of thing. Maybe look for somebody crippled by a

personality disorder. Or someone who functions at a very low level, and has therefore been made poor, or someone made lame by one bad decision after another. Make sure it's no one you could ever be attracted to. Make sure you don't expect anything in return. Maybe look for someone without a church home, or on the margins of this church, because down the road, you can invite and bring them to church.

Don't worry about what others might think, because Jesus didn't worry about that when he called you a friend. If anything, others might conclude you must be a disciple of Jesus, because you are certainly following Jesus by reaching out and caring for the poor and lowly.

I'd like to see every one of us have an unequal friendship, where we do most of the giving. Find someone who really needs a friend and then love and serve that one as Jesus loves and serves you. And when the time is right, (and you'll know when it's right), point them to Christ who is their Friend, the Friend of all Sinners, whose greater love caused him to lay down his life us, his friends. Thanks be to God.

Amen.

