

**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church  
Watertown, WI**

**“Lopsided Friendships”**

Rev. David K. Groth

Good Friday, 2021

*“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lays down his life for his friends” (Jn 15:13).*

Have you ever had a lopsided friendship? Have you ever been the one to do most of the inviting, most of the cooking and planning and paying? A friendship where they respond when it's convenient, with a one-word text, unless they are having another crisis. Then they ambush your phone. Have you ever had a lopsided friendship where they never show up on time, or frequently cancel on you and you have the sneaking suspicion it's because they had a better gig come up? Have you ever had a friend who will probably not defend you in front of others and may even join in sharp criticism of you? A friend who isn't reliable; you can't count on him.

Lopsided friendship. That's the way it's always been between God and me. I don't always call Him . . . unless I really need Him to fix something . . . then I storm the gates of heaven with my supplications. I don't always listen to Him. I don't always invite Him to events and may not be eager to introduce Him to my other friends. It's a friendship where He always does the food preparation and the planning and the paying, yet my gratitude to Him is nominal at best. I know I sometimes embarrass Him. I can be rude, negligent, poorly behaved, unreliable. . . and if a better gig comes up, I may cancel on Him. Yet inexplicably He remains my Friend and has assured me that He will always be my Friend.

“Greater love has no one than this, 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 this in the upper room discourse, which Pastor DeNoyer focused on during the midweek Lenten services. We conclude the series today.

What remarkable grace that the Son of God should call us friends and lay down His life for us! After all, what do we have to offer Him? 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. He doesn't need your company, your companionship, your help along the way. He never has a leaky faucet or a buggy computer 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 us. He doesn't need our gratitude, our worship, our offerings. 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).

So what do you give the One who has everything? Maybe that's why some talk about giving Him our hearts, as if they were something treasurable, made of gold and silver and precious gems. But do you remember what Jesus said about our hearts? “Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander” (Mt. 15: 19). Such a sac full of putrid things. Is that such a nice gift for our dear Lord Jesus?

I have called you friends. The Bible warns to choose your 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 . . . lest you learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare" (v. 24). 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 but see how the Lord God 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 tax collectors and prostitutes and men and women who are quarrelsome and given to anger, and in so doing He entangles Himself in our snares, our problems, our sin. Because He is Friend of Sinners, He suffers the white-hot wrath of God and men on a cross.

Why did our dear Lord do it? Why did He lay down His life on a cross to fix our mess, and forgive our sins, and die our death? We'd like to think we had *something* to do with it, some attribute he could see, some hidden potential. But we had nothing to do with it. It's all grace. "You did not choose me, but I chose you." He chose us as His friends because he knows how desperately we need Him. It was compassion and pity and love for the loveless that kindled His friendship to us.

It is a lopsided friendship of the highest order. He does *all* the giving. We do all the receiving. He pays all the costs. He does all the work, makes all the plans. He didn't lose His life on the cross. He gave it. He laid it down for you and in so doing He gives you forgiveness and eternal life. Such Good News that He is your Friend and mine!

But there's more. He challenges us to befriend others as He has befriended us. 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, in the name of Jesus Christ, have a lopsided friendship, a friendship where you do most of the giving. Maybe look for somebody hobbled by depression, or isolated by immobility and old age. Maybe look for an immigrant who struggles with English. Or someone who has a terrible disease, or someone who functions at a very low intellectual level. Make sure it's no one you could ever be attracted to. Make sure you don't expect anything in return. Make sure you don't come on strong but then vanish after the novelty has worn off.

Don't worry about what others may think of your new friendship, because Jesus didn't worry about that when He you called you His friend. If anything, people may even figure you must be a disciple of Jesus, because you are certainly following in His ways.

I'd like to see every one of us have a lopsided friendship, where we do most of the giving. And when the time is right point them to Christ who is their Friend too, a Friend of all sinners. This day especially we remember how His great love and compassion and mercy caused Him to lay down His life for us, His friends. Amen.