

John 15: 12-17
“Fellowship (You Just Call Out My Name)”
Rev. Lou Nyiri
March 7, 2021

Title Slide

This morning’s message is based upon John 15:12-17, let’s lean in & listen...to God’s word for us this day...

Scripture Slides – John 15:12-17

Let us Pray:

Come, O Holy Spirit, come.
Come as the fire and burn,
Come as the wind and cleanse,
Come as the light and reveal,
Convict us, Convert us, Consecrate us...until we are wholly thine.

And now, Lord, my prayer is simply this:
That the words of my mouth
And the words of all our hearts will be found pleasing and acceptable to you,
for you are our rock and our redeemer...Amen.

Title Slide

Sermon

Have you ever had that one friend or group of friends you could count on to keep you grounded?
Who asked you pertinent life questions?
Who helped you move beyond busyness as the barometer of well-being toward significance.
The one(s) with whom you could share your deepest doubts, joys, longings, fears, dreams, confusions, searchings.
The one(s) who knew how hard to push you & when to gently give you space.
The one(s) of whom you think whenever you hear *“You’ve Got a Friend”* –

[Slide – Carole King / The Beatles / Indigo Girls / Randy Newman]

You just call out my name
& you know wherever I am
I’ll come running
... ..
Winter, Spring, Summer or Fall
All ya have to do is call
& I’ll be there – you’ve got friend

Perhaps you prefer *The Beatles* – “I get by with a little help from my friends.”

Maybe you like *The Indigo Girls* – “I am looking for someone, who can take as much as I give,
Give back as much as I need.”

Maybe it's Randy Newman's – You've Got a Friend in Me from Pixar's Toy Story –

When the road looks rough ahead
And you're miles and miles
From your nice warm bed
You just remember what your old pal said

... ..

You've got a friend in me

[Title Slide]

Whichever melodic friendship tune you prefer, the point is the church has been proclaiming this message for twenty plus centuries: In the Christian community the only way we get by is with help from our friends.

Spiritual friends / Soul friends are the people who pull us toward God.

We find unity among these friends who draw us nearer to themselves & nearer to God – by how they interact with us & how they interact with God – we learn a lot by talking & watching. The unity of souls we find among Christ-followers stems not so much from attraction – rather it is from the union Jesus seeks with each one of us.

This Christian fellowship is referred to in the word *koinonia* – it is one that “reaches across all earthly barriers and distinctions.”

In this fellowship, we are bound to each other as we are – more importantly – we are bound to the One whom we follow – Jesus the Christ.

The great descriptor & even greater grace of our journey is that there is no such thing as a solitary Christian.

To be Christian – a Christ-Follower – is to be part of the body of Christ.

These local communities in which we live out our faith – i.e. the Church – give faces & names to our companions on the journey.

[Slide – Thomas Moore]

Thomas Moore writes of this in the following way, “Friends interested in each other at the soul level [i.e. spiritual friends] do not simply look at each other's lives and listen to each other's explanations. They look together at this third thing...and in that mutual gaze they find and sustain their friendship.”

For Moore, the third thing is the soul itself; in a Christian context, the third thing is nothing less than God.

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Spiritual/Soul friends don't advise as often as they listen and sift through life experiences – together.

They are partnered together in the quest for deeper communion with God.

They take avid interest in discerning together what God is up to in their lives.

They attend to the state of their spiritual lives, asking questions like:

What have you been praying about lately?

Are you creating time for God in your schedule?

What do you hear God calling you to do or be in your vocation?

Do your priorities need re-aligned?

What prevents you from letting go of bad habits?

[Slide – Joel and Me]

For me that person was Joel.

I met Joel at an annual week-long Presbyterian summer camp.

Our initial connect was he lived in the town of my maternal grandparents.

We hit it off pretty well – pretty quick.

He played baseball / I played baseball (actually he played baseball & I sat on the bench).

He had two older siblings / I had two older siblings.

He told really bad jokes / I still tell really bad jokes.

He loved God though was still working it out / I loved God though was still working it out.

After that week, whenever we visited my Mom's grandparents we'd call Joel and I'd visit or sometimes get to spend the night at his house.

After that week, we called each other every so often to talk – and it was like picking up right where we left off.

After that week, we wrote letters to stay in touch.

Keep in mind, this was back in the 80's – we rode dinosaurs to school back then – we didn't have email / caller id / video chat –

We just had persistence, perseverance & a healthy dose of God's grace to grow a friendship that kept each other grounded and helped work through some of life's big questions.

Joel and I helped each other discern calls into the ministry.

We helped each other grieve the death of a parent & grandparents.

We celebrated and participated in each other's weddings.

We continue with "out of the blue" emails, phone calls or Facebook messages to each other - & - like when we were teens it feels like picking up where we left off from our last conversation.

We've been working through life & faith together for over thirty-five years.

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It is a gift to discover this kind of spiritual/soul friendship in our lives – it is truly God’s gracious gift when we find those with whom we can share - & - with whom we find similar heart cadences.

[Slide – Spiritual Friendships]

Spiritual friendships are love triangles whose three angles include the other, the self, and – always – God.

They are a means of grace which serve as avenues for truer and deeper communion with God. What sets these relationships apart from other friendships is their intentionality to place God in the triangle – at the apex.

We self-consciously bring God into the relationship.

When we grow closer to God – we lessen the gap between us and our friend.

We find deeper depths of being – within ourselves and the friendship.

Since we grow at different rates – one of the wonderful effects is the Godward pull of another. If my friend has experienced an insight or deepening in their communion with God – if I am open to & invested in the friendship, then I may just find myself almost magnetically drawn closer to God as well.

Spiritual friendships / Soul friends nurture our ability to listen for God - offering company as we seek God’s will - & - strengthen us for faith’s long road.

[Slide – Aelred of Rievaulx]

Aelred of Rievaulx (1109-1167) wrote *Spiritual Friendship* which became a seminal work of the monastic treatises on friendship.

Rievaulx saw virtue in the fact that friends draw one another beyond themselves toward God. Aelred defined spiritual friendship as “a path to the love and knowledge of God.”

Spiritual friendships nurtured in Christian community offer space to come as we are - & to be drawn into deeper relationship with God’s incarnate – *God’s in-the-flesh* love – Jesus the Christ. Within the community of Christ-Followers – friendships are cemented together in grace, laughter, tears, and trust as we seek to love and be loved by the God who deeply loves us.

[Slide – Parker Palmer lone image]

Parker Palmer speaks of this when writing about the knowledge of truth revealed through personal relationships which involve vulnerability, faithfulness, and risk-filled interacting among those involved.

Palmer posits such a relationship originates in compassion and love.

[down arrow to reveal quote on Parker Palmer lone image]

“The goal,” Palmer believes, “arising from [this kind of] love is the reunification and reconstruction of broken selves and worlds.”

[Title Slide Image only]

{Livestream Camera – if you can focus for a bit on the candle holder next to lectern that might be a nice image}

Many years ago, a graduating senior in our youth group gave me an earthenware candle holder shaped as a circle of people, arms over shoulders, looking into the light holding center. She told me this is what the group felt like to her. People who hold together as we soak in the light.

Through this net of relationships, we come to know ourselves as being “in Christ.”

Bound together within the boundaries of Christ’s body, we become defined by Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection.

I believe this senior student got it – communion is a communal venture.

It is a way of *holding together as we soak in the light* – cemented together in grace, laughter, tears, and trust as we seek to love and be loved by the God who deeply loves us.

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{Livestream Camera – if you can focus for a bit between now and end of sermon on Communion Elements that might be a nice image}

At the Last Supper, Jesus gave disciples “a new commandment” ‘...to love one another as Jesus loved them...’

Jesus also said, ‘no longer do I call you servants...I have called you friends.’

This circle of Jesus’ friends – the people called Christians (Christ-followers) – has been making friends ever since – this fellowship has been creating an ever-widening circle uniquely created by God to be in relationship.

Jesus invites disciples to share in relationship to one another - & - in his relationship with God and the Holy Spirit.

Cemented together in grace, laughter, tears, and trust as we seek to love and be loved by the God who deeply loves us.

Amen & Amen.