

Jesus, Our Best Friend!

John 15:9-17

A noted pastor/writer tells this story:

When the First World War ended, the King and Queen of Belgium wanted to honor President Herbert Hoover for the aid they had received from the United States during the war. After considering the various available honors, the monarchs offered Hoover his choice of three decorations. Hoover rejected them all stating, "***You have stood at the gateway of civilization and held back the tide of aggression while we have only shared with you what we had to give. For that one does not ask for honors.***" The king and queen responded, "**He is our very great friend.**" Desiring to adequately express their appreciation for his efforts, they created a new order to which Hoover alone belonged, the Order of "**Friend of the Belgian people.**" (David Hoke)

It is not within my ability to create a new order this morning, but if I could I would create one for Jesus Christ, and I would call it, the **Order of "Friend of all people!"** Search all of human history, travel to the four corners of the world, launch out into deep space, indeed leave no remote corner of the universe unexplored, and you will not find a greater Friend of humanity than our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

It seems to me that if there's a universal need that we all feel, it's the need for true friends who know us and still love us. The bumps of life need the shock absorber of friendship. In fact, an Icelandic proverb says that "One enemy is too many and a hundred friends are too few." How true!

A few years back, Pepper Rogers, head football coach at UCLA, was going through just a terrible season. It got so bad that it even upset his home life. He didn't think his wife was encouraging him enough.

He recalls, "My dog was my only friend. So I told my wife that a man needs at least two friends. She went out and bought me another dog!"

Well, I don't really think that the dog is Man's best friend. Henry Ford was having lunch on one occasion with a certain man when he suddenly asked the man, "Who is your best friend?" The man started naming various people. "Perhaps this one, or maybe that one is my best friend." "No," said Ford, "I'll tell you who your best friend is." He then took out a pencil and wrote on the tablecloth this sentence: "Your best friend is the one who brings out the best that is within you."

Now, listen to this fabulous truth: the Bible tells us that through Jesus Christ believers are able to “*participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires*” (2 Peter 1:4). In other words, Jesus is able to bring out the best that is within us. Should that really surprise us? After all, who better knows the hidden potential that lies within us than our Creator and Saviour, Jesus Christ?

Moreover, what could be better than participating in the divine nature? We were created in the image of God, unfallen and pristine creatures, perfectly suited for fellowship with our Creator. We certainly were never divine, for we were created as mortals, but there was absolutely nothing in us to preclude or hinder our experiencing the life of God, our doing the will of God, or our participating in the nature and work of God. All of this was within our grasp because we were designed to be our best selves.

Tragically the fall of Man took all of that away. I think that anyone with sensitivity can see that human beings are not as they were intended to be. Evil has brought about a disintegration of the human soul. Hence the disintegration of society as a whole. Fr. Ailbe M. O’Reilly puts it this way:

“Undoubtedly the splendor of the human soul was reduced through original sin. The heart of man no longer shone as God desired it to shine. Divine love had been lost. Man’s heart wandered far from God; he lived in a spiritual desert, but God still loved man. He still recognized a great beauty in the human person, the beauty of being made in the image of God.”

Perhaps that is why in Deuteronomy 32:10 we read these words of poetry describing God’s loving care for Jacob, who symbolizes God’s people: “*He found him in a desert land, and in the howling waste of the wilderness, He encircled him, He cared for him, He kept him as the apple of His eye.*”

Humanity has always been the apple of God’s eye. The Bible tells us the even before the creation of Man, God foresaw the fall of Man. And in the unfathomable reaches of eternity past God purposed in His heart to rescue us. The Apostle Paul wrote that God “*chose us in him [Christ] before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight (the best that we can be). In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will*” (Eph. 1:4-5). Think of it, Paul says that it gave God pleasure as He planned to rescue us from our lostness and spiritual death!

Jesus, looking ahead to his own crucifixion, told Nicodemus, “*For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life*” (John 3:16).

Later, Jesus said to his disciples, "*I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you **friends**, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.*" (John 15:15).

What a high honour Jesus bestowed upon his disciples! It was as if our Lord was telling them that from that time on they would become his partners. In the Greek culture of the day a slave could never be a partner. The slave was defined in Greek law as a *living tool*. The Greek master never opened his mind to one of his servants. The servant was expected to do what he was told without reason and without explanation. But Jesus does not consider his followers to be mindless slaves. The Lord shares his mind with us; he opens his heart to us. It's as if he says to us, "After you have seen me on the cross, after you have visited the empty tomb, and after I have come to you in resurrection power you will know that I am your best Friend."

Someone has said, "A friend is one who never gets in the way, except when we are on the way down." Well when we had all fallen down, Jesus came from Heaven to Earth to be our Saviour. What kind of a friend is Jesus? How much does He love us? With his own words Jesus said, "**Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends**" (John 15:13). It's just what the Master did for us on the cross! Paul Simon wrote a song that speaks of this kind of sacrifice for another. Listen to these words from the song *Bridge Over Troubled Water*:

*"When you're weary, feelin' small
When tears are in your eyes,
I'll dry them all. I'm on your side.*

*Oh when times get rough,
And friends just can't be found,
Like a bridge over troubled water
I will lay **me** down.*

*When you're down and out,
When you're on the street,
When evening falls so hard,
I will comfort you.
I'll take your part.*

*Oh, when darkness comes,
And pain is all around,
Like a bridge over troubled water,
I will lay **me** down.
Like a bridge over troubled water,
I will lay **me** down."*

Jesus is our bridge over troubled water! Jesus is our best friend. He laid ***Himself*** down by giving his life for us. If there were a thousand steps separating us from God, then by going to the cross Jesus took nine hundred and ninety-nine of them in our direction. But he now says to us, "I have left the last step for you. It is the step of faith. You must take it my direction. You must trust me! You must be willing to believe that I am ready to be your best friend."

If you visit Nashville, Tennessee, you will likely visit the Hermitage, home of President Andrew Jackson. Jackson transformed American politics and put his own indelible stamp on government. When you visit his tomb, you'll see that buried right next to him is his valet. In his will Jackson gave him a lifetime position. All his life he lived next to Jackson and is buried beside him. When you consider the social inequities of that time, you realize that there was an amazing bond between master and servant, between a president and his valet.

But that bond is a pale shadow of the bond that exists between Jesus Christ and his true followers. If you will become one, then you will discover that Jesus is your best Friend. He is the one Friend who can take you beyond the grave. Jesus – and Jesus alone - gives eternal life, real life, full life, satisfying life.

Don't settle for a grave beside a dead man. Commit your life and everlasting future to the One who is your best Friend, Jesus Christ, Conqueror of death and Master of the art of living.