

# Jesus, Friends and Moms

Sunday, May 9, 2021 – Mother's Day  
St. Luke's United Church of Christ, Lititz, Pennsylvania  
Pastor James Haun

## John 15:9-17

*As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may vbe in you, and that your joy may be complete.*

*'This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me, but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.*

Our gospel lesson presents us with a brief, and frankly, confusing teaching of our Lord. *You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends.* Jesus calls us friends, and this is wonderful, but we must ask, what precisely does this mean, and can it really be so? This status of friendship seems contradictory to much of what Jesus is saying. In this same brief passage Jesus speaks of *his commandments* to us three times! It has also been pointed out that this teaching of our being friends is not mentioned anywhere else in the scriptures. So what does Jesus mean when he calls us his friends? Does he really mean it, or is he acting like the high-spirited boss who joyfully announces at the office Christmas party that from now on you may call him by his first name? A wise employee knows better to address the boss so informally on that evening and especially in the months ahead. Jesus does call his disciples, and he calls us, friends, and he means it. This is, however, a mysterious teaching which requires some careful study, as well as some special insight from Mom.

John 15 is a portion of the lengthy teachings given by our Lord on the night of his betrayal. On that night Jesus presented himself as a servant, and he washed the feet of the disciples to prove it, but the overriding theme was his Lordship. Even when

speaking to the disciples about servanthood he makes clear his status as Lord. In John 13:13 he remarks, *You call me Lord... and rightly so*. Jesus also gives them many commandments as a Lord and Master would do. Not only did Jesus present himself as Lord, but the full power of his Lordship was soon to be revealed in his conquering of death through the crucifixion and resurrection! Jesus is soon to be exalted as Lord over all!

In light of all this, a call to friendship seems foolishly familiar. On more than one occasion the Bible warns us that *Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*. Friendship seems to assume an equality which is grossly inappropriate. We must always be careful how we presume friendship. In our informal age titles are much less in use, and this may not always be good. As my sons entered the work world, I warned them that though many in management will often be addressed by their first name, always beware of calling anyone by their first name who has the authority to fire you.

So how shall we address Jesus? The last word on Jesus seems to be that *every knee should bow.... and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord* (Philippians 2:10, 11). This Thursday is Ascension Day when we recall Jesus being taken up into heaven where he is now seated at the right hand of the Father. Jesus now reigns. He is now in the driver's seat, so to speak, and he shall return in glory to judge the living and dead. Every knee should indeed bow before our Risen Lord and Savior. I so appreciate the tradition of kneeling here at St. Luke's. To the world it may seem an archaic and primitive practice, but it is actually a very appropriate sign of the greatness of our God and of our own humble status before Him.

In light of this amazing Lordship, what are we to think of the promise of friendship? This calls for a close look at the text and the three mentions of friendship which Jesus makes. The first mention of friendship comes with the promise that we are recipients of an amazing love. *This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends*. What greater love could there be, and we are the ones honored to receive that gift! To us the words of Facebook, we have truly been friended! This all calls to my memory the wonderful chorus, *O How He Loves You and Me*. The words are simple and compelling. *O how He loves you and me. O how He loves you and me. He gave His life, what more could he give? O how He loves you. O how he loves me. O how He loves you and me*.

The next mention of friendship is a call for a mutual love. *You are my friends if you do what I command you*. At first this verse sounds quite odd. Friend and command are not words which seem to belong together, and any friend who was regularly giving us commands would be considered a very bossy friend at best. It does not seem right for a friend to command another friend for this seems to lack the shared respect and love that friendship involve. But let us look again. What is the command? The command is to love one another in the way which Christ has shown us to do. We are to sacrifice ourselves for the sake of one another. Jesus is calling us to a radical and

mutual love, and as we dare to engage in such love, we find ourselves in an amazing harmony and relationship with the Savior who first loved us! None of us can love as perfectly as Jesus has loved us, but just the same Jesus urges us to love as He loves, and in that to become friends.

It is the third and final mention of friendship which brings us to the heart of Jesus' promise of friendship. *I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.* Jesus contrasts the servant and the friend. Servant is a title we should all be glad to take upon ourselves as Christ's people, but Jesus is assuring us that we are going to be even better than servants. A servant, Jesus explains, merely takes orders. No questions are allowed for the servant. We are now friends, and though we must still take orders as servants there has been a change. Jesus now speaks of taking us into his confidence and explaining to us God's big plan. Granted, there is so much of God's plan for the world, for the Church and for our lives which we do not yet understand, but there is so much that we do! Jesus is telling us that He has confided in us His understanding of God's will for Him and for the building of the Kingdom. The Bible is full of the revealing of God's plan and God wants us to be informed workers and not mere slaves who are being told to work harder and to ask no questions. Jesus is one we can approach in prayer and Bible study with a host of questions. He will not be offended but will delight to guide us into understanding. This is what friends do.

Jesus calls us friend, and as friendship is a mutual kind of thing, we can call Jesus our friend. But this is indeed a special kind of friendship whose mystery demands careful consideration. How do we put Lord and friend—two apparently contradictory terms—together? I suppose this shall long be something of a mystery, however, there is a great amount of understanding which we can gain into this mystery by considering Mom. Mom holds the answer, and that answer is not so hard to grasp! Mom is ever our friend, yet ever exalted! On Mother's Day, and I trust at very regular intervals around the year, we are awed and impressed by the depth of a mother's love. To be a mother is to find an exalted status, especially in the Lord's army. The commandments insist that we honor our mother and father, and with this command is a promise of life. I have heard some speak of how in childhood they were in a child-mother relationship, but now that they are grown up, they are friends. It is a wonderful thing to grow up and then address Mom in an adult-to-adult way, but this understanding of motherhood has a serious blind spot. A mother is always a mother. She is always an exalted one in our lives and we dare not forget this.

Mom seems to have all the answers, doesn't she? And here we can find great insight as to how Jesus can be Lord and friend. Consider Jesus' relationship to God the Father, and the invitation for us to also address God as Father. It is the parental role which best explains the honor and the friendship which are due to God. The reverence and respect that go with honoring our Lord may be difficult for us to hold together with

the love and affection which accompany friendship, but we must try to keep both of these dimensions in our relationship to God. We too easily view God with only one of those dimensions in mind. To only think of Jesus as friend leads to a casual kind of faith, while seeing Him only as Lord can lead us to a formal kind of faith.

Beware the casual faith. Those who practice a very casual faith are correct in their desire to be honest with God. They may stress the importance of having a personal relationship with Christ and being sure that one is feeling relaxed and feeling at home before God. Their favorite hymn is likely to be Just as I Am, and that is the way which they believe people should present themselves to God. The casual believer holds Jesus' promise to be our friend very closely. To them, formality only gets in the way and threatens to turn what should be a deeply personal faith into mere ritual. This may be all well and good, but thinking of Jesus only in this casual manner often leads to other dangers. Such familiarity with Jesus may keep us from kneeling, and our spirits can become puffed up with pride. Aesop wisely observed that familiarity breeds contempt and we must be cautious that this does not happen to us. Beware a casual faith!

Beware a formal faith too. The formal Christian will stress the importance of seeing Christ as Lord, and therefore always showing appropriate honor and respect. Generally speaking, this too is a very good thing. It is good to show proper respect, and it would be a better world if people made a habit of this. We live in a day so focused upon the egalitarian and casual that we forget that Christ is our superior and to show proper respect. Some think it odd that when I do my barbering, I usually wear a tie. Why so formal? This is done out of a respect for the profession of barbering, and it is also done out of respect for the customer, as a servant must always show honor to the one they are serving. I do not present all this as a hard and fast rule which all other barbers should be observing, and I certainly don't mean to be picking a fight over the rules of attire! What I do mean to say that I need to be reminded of the respect which is due certain people and callings, and this concern very much applies to our faith and walk with Jesus Christ! But let us also beware of a formal faith, for a formal faith can too easily become sidetracked into thinking only of forms and practices, or white shirts and ties, and lose touch with the personal and relational aspects of our walk with God.

Jesus has called us friends. How honored we are! Let us be Jesus' friends and may we delight in that close relationship into which we have been called. But let us not become so focused upon the idea of friendship that we deal with Jesus too casually and forget His absolute Lordship. Let us be Jesus' friends, just as we are Mom's friends, with hearts full of gratitude, love and admiration, and a deep desire to honor and exalt those who have attained such a high rank of honor in the Kingdom.

Praise be to our Lord and Friend Jesus Christ, and happy Mother's Day!