

6TH SUNDAY OF EASTER
May 17, a.D. 2009
John 15: 9 – 17

What do friends and food have in common? Both are needed, food to support the body and friends to support you. Both are gifts from God. A good friend is part of our daily bread that our gracious God gives and that he teaches us to pray for in the 4th petition: Give us this day our daily bread.

Childhood friends often are the ones living closest to you and go to the same school. Adult friends usually share the same core values as you do. Time and distance cannot separate good friends.

An old friend found me on facebook last month after 28 years. We grew up together and went to school together but lost contact after high school until last month. We arranged to meet last week but I didn't recognize him at first sight. Age has a way of moving hair around from here to here and also redistributing the weight but one thing didn't change and that was the ability to open up, to confide in, to enjoy each other's company, to trust and to support one another. Three and a half hours of catching up vanished as if it were one moment.

Friendships can also be forged during war. From basic training to the cold and damp trenches of bloody battlefields, the brotherhood of soldiers is made strong when fighting the enemy side by side. There are many tales of bravery and love on the battlefield when a soldier sacrificed his life for a friend.

Whoever has friends that are so dear to him, that he offers his life for them, the love of such a friend is made complete and full. No greater love has a man for his friends that he lay down his life for them.

For that very reason, Jesus calls you his friend. He opened up himself when he told you the mystery of salvation. He told you that he was going to die for you, that he would join you to himself in holy baptism and give you his body and his blood for food. He has uncovered the truth of his Word to you. And so you are no longer slaves but friends of God.

Since we are named friends of Jesus, we have certain responsibilities of being his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command, He says. We are to do what our

gracious Lord commands us. And so we bind ourselves to the sound doctrine of His word even if it meets bitter opposition from a loveless world.

Love each other. As Christ has loved us we are to love one another. Commandments 4 through 10 make it clear the love we are to have for one another.

And thirdly, bear fruit that will last. Christ is speaking of fruit in his kingdom. The thick and hard, calloused hands of daily work, from washing clothes to assembling a car on the line, comes to an end. This is indeed important and godly work in our vocations, but it will not endure the ages. However, what is accomplished in the name of Christ will last forever, whether it is supporting the preaching of God's word or sharing the love of Christ with a friend.

These are the responsibilities of being Jesus' friend. Now let's see what kind of friends we have been. Have we been always patient with God in time of illness or sorrow? Have we carried our neighbour's burdens to God in prayer, overlooking their weaknesses? Have we eagerly searched what God commands in his Word and then proudly kept it in our lives? Have we stood up for Jesus when His name is misused and stopped the abuse with words such as, "Why do you take my Lord's name in vain. I love him and obey him"?

A friend does what is right and good, even if it means sacrificing life itself. Where were the friends of Jesus when he went to the cross? Did the sheep not scatter when the shepherd was struck down? Every one of his disciples deserted him in his time of need, Judas betrayed him and when the Lord's name was misused in the courtyard, Peter piled on and joined them. What makes us think we are any better? Repent.

The love that God has for us never starts with us. It begins with the love that God the father has for his Son. In the beginning the Father loved his Son and then the Son has loved us. We did not choose him as our Saviour. He chose us. Even in the middle of our self-centered mess, while we were stuck in being friends of the world instead of God, he hand-picked you and loved you.

Christ is always there because he rose from the dead for you. He accepts you as you are, his friend. He forgives you, no matter what you try to hide from Him. His love for you rests on him not on what you do or fail to do.

He promises to do for you whatever you ask in His name. Usually we use God's name and pray so that we might be more fruitful and accomplish more for him. Jesus turns it around and says that you bear fruit because of the faith he has given to you and then the Father will hear your prayers.

And then this radical Lord invites you to come to His table and dine with him in His Supper as He welcomes forgiven sinners at heaven's feast. See how he has made you and kept you as a friend. How foolish to think that this all came to be because I made him Lord!

By his work on the cross, Jesus makes you his enduring friend. He keeps you a friend by feeding you the bread of life. He shares everything with you and holds nothing back. Can we find a friend so faithful? He knows your sorrow and gives you the fullness of his joy. Go in the peace of the Lord since he has set you free, friend of God.