

1 John 5:1-6

5:1 Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child.

5:2 By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.

5:3 For the love of God is this, that we obey his commandments. And his commandments are not burdensome,

5:4 for whatever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith.

5:5 Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?

5:6 This is the one who came by water and blood, Jesus Christ, not with the water only but with the water and the blood. And the Spirit is the one that testifies, for the Spirit is the truth.

John 15:9-17

15:9 As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love.

15:10 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.

15:11 I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

15:12 "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.

15:13 No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.

15:14 You are my friends if you do what I command you.

15:15 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.

15:16 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.

15:17 I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Proclamation of the Word

Raise your hand if you have a BFF? a BAE? a best friend. I have a hard time keeping up with the lingo nowadays. Friends- we all need them.

What is a friend? a youth leader asked her youth group as they sat around eating pizza at church?

"A friend is someone who is herself." "A friend is nice." "A friend cares about you, listens to your problems, and helps you." "A friend thinks about you before he thinks about himself." "A friend cares about other people's opinions and beliefs, and respects them."

The youth leader writes, "I notice that all these definitions describe how a person acts, not just how she feels or what she says."

Friends are one of God's most important gifts.

In today's passage from John's gospel, Jesus tell his best friends, his disciples, some things before he leaves them. Jesus knows he will face his own persecution and death. This is part of what scholars call the "Farewell Discourse." Jesus is taking leave, and he wants to make sure they know how to live without him. I have experienced this with the terminally ill. Everyone wants to make sure the important things are said knowing Hospice has been called and time is short. Or maybe this is what dinner looks like at your house the night before the college freshman moves onto campus. Jesus' words are as significant as the "remember who you are and where you come from" speeches a father or mother might make. All of life's "farewell discourses" are significant when they are done in love. And today's passage could turn into a list of "shoulds," or a To Do list. After all, Jesus commands are things that should be done like love one another. Imagine the dinner table talk before college. Don't forget to change your sheets sometimes. Study first before fun. Get involved on campus. So goes the list of things to do.

Our Confirmands are making a public faith profession and Christian commitment. They have had a to do list: service projects with family, with a covenant partner, memorization, attendance, and a retreat. This was not simply a to do list, but a way to grow in relationship with community and with God because God's love first manifest itself in relationship. Today Jesus is speaking to his friends, not his students, not his co-workers, his friends. Just like the youth observed to their youth leader- friends love one another in actions and words. Today our Confirmands are professing their faith that they trust Jesus to be their friend, their guide, their Lord.

Have you ever considered that Jesus is our friend?

Friends are people who want to be a part of our lives, just because. There are plenty of relationships in life, but friendship is a gift and a choice.

The good news of Jesus' words is that he choose you. He chooses and loves you first. Just as Cortlinn, Alexis, Benton, and Carter make a faith commitment today, we remember that first God chose each of us in love. God created you. That is what we celebrate in baptism, before you could even talk, walk, or love back, God loves you and gives you a church family to show you God's love and to teach you God's ways. Many of us know what it is like to not be chosen, the hurt, rejection, the humiliation.

God first chose you.

Philip Yancyⁱⁱ writes about this:

Not long ago I received in the mail a postcard from a friend that had on it only six words, "I am the one Jesus loves." I smiled when I saw the return address, for my strange friend excels at these pious slogans. When I called him, though, he told me the slogan came from the author and speaker Brennan Manning.

At a seminar, Manning referred to Jesus' closest friend on earth, the disciple named John, identified in the Gospels as "the one Jesus loved." Manning said, "If John were to be asked, 'What is your primary identity in life?' he would not reply, 'I am a disciple, an apostle, an evangelist, an author of one of the four Gospels,' but rather, 'I am the one Jesus loves.'"

What if every morning we looked in the mirror and reminded ourselves that this is our primary identity? I am the one Jesus loves. Not to the exclusion of others, of course.

Friends choose each other just because. This is not the first time the bible talks about friendship with God.

Frederick Beuchner writes:

The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to a friend," the book of Exodus says (33:11), and in the book of Isaiah it is God himself who says the same thing of Abraham. "Abraham, my friend," he calls him (41:8). It is a staggering thought.

The love of God. The mercy of God. The judgment of God. You take the shoes off your feet and stand as you would before a mountain or at the edge of the sea. But the friendship of God?

It is not something God does. It is something Abraham and God or Moses and God do together. Not even God can be a friend all by himself apparently. You see Abraham, say, not standing at all, but sitting down, loosening his prayer shawl, trimming the end off his cigar. He is not being creature for the moment, and God is not being Creator. There is no agenda. They are simply being together, the two of them, and being themselves.

Is it a privilege only for patriarchs? Not as far as Jesus is concerned at least. "You are my friends," he says, "if you do what I command you." The command, of course, is "to love one another," as he puts it. To be his friends, that is to say, we have to be each other's friends, conceivably even lay down our lives for each other. You never know (John 15:12-15). It is a high price to pay, and Jesus does not pretend otherwise, but the implication is that it's worth every cent.

Being friends with Jesus changes your life. Knowing that "I am the one God loves" makes all the difference. And it makes us want to share that love, show it, spread it.

Last month David Brooks wrote in his piece, "The Moral Bucket List," that one characteristic of those who live a highly moral life is "energizing love." He describes characteristics of amazing people. Brooks decides that he would rather have eulogy virtues rather than resume virtues.

He writes about one of my heroes in the faith Dorothy Day as having the virtue of "energizing love." She was a kind of an American Mother Teresa. Almost one hundred years ago, Dorothy Day as a young woman was lost: drinking, carousing, without direction. But then she became a mother. The birth of

her daughter changed her heart. She wrote of that birth, "I had written the greatest book, composed the greatest symphony, painted the most beautiful painting or carved the most exquisite figure I could not have felt the more exalted creator than I did when they placed my child in my arms."

As a mother, I understand her feelings.

He writes:

That kind of love decenters the self. It reminds you that your true riches are in another. Most of all, this love electrifies. It puts you in a state of need and makes it delightful to serve what you love. Day's love for her daughter spilled outward and upward. As she wrote, "No human creature could receive or contain so vast a flood of love and joy as I often felt after the birth of my child. With this came the need to worship, to adore."

She made unshakable commitments in all directions. She became a Catholic, started a radical newspaper, opened settlement houses for the poor and lived among the poor, embracing shared poverty as a way to build community, to not only do good, but be good. This gift of love overcame, sometimes, the natural self-centeredness all of us feel.ⁱⁱⁱ

This is the kind of commitment to love that Jesus is describing. Once Jesus becomes your friend, love is an imperative. Not a must do, but a joy. Not a requirement, but a blessing. Not a have to, but a want to. I bet our Haiti Outreach travelers who came home last night know this experience, bone tired, but with spirits so full. Jesus said I tell you these things so my joy may be in you, and your joy may be complete.

Jesus calls us out of ourselves and into the creative work of blessing others with life and love. That kind of love leads us to adore God, to worship God, to pour out energy and our very being for one another. It de-centers us, makes us less selfish. And we bear good fruit like Jesus describes. It all starts with that relationship, that friendship.

So to our Confirmands making a faith commitment today, and all of us examining our own faith journey, may you first of all know that you are beloved. You are the one that God loves! And through your growing friendship with Jesus, may you set the world on fire with God's redeeming love.

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Easter 6B/Confirmation Sunday

ⁱ <https://melissabanesevier.wordpress.com/2015/05/05/friended>

ⁱⁱ Phillip Yancey, *What's so Amazing about Grace?* (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, MI, 1997).

ⁱⁱⁱ David Brooks, "The Moral Bucket list," in the New York Times, April 11, 2015.