

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

Jesus calls us friends, no longer servants.

In the 1999 irreverent film, *Dogma*ⁱ, there is a scene where the Cardinal stands on the steps of the church at a press conference to reveal this year's church theme, "Catholicism WOW."

Announcer: Ladies and Gentlemen, the driving force behind Catholicism WOW, Cardinal Glick.

Cardinal Glick: Thank you, thank you, thank you. Now we all know how the majority and the media in this country view the Catholic church. They think of us as a passé, archaic institution. People find the Bible obtuse... even hokey. Now in an effort to disprove all that the church has appointed this year as a time of renewal... both of faith and of style. For example, the crucifix. While it has been a time honored symbol of our faith, Holy Mother Church has decided to retire this highly recognizable, yet wholly depressing image of our Lord crucified. Christ didn't come to Earth to give us the willies... He came to help us out. He was a booster. And it is with that take on our Lord in mind that we've come up with a new, more inspiring sigil. So it is with great pleasure that I present you with the first of many revamps the "Catholicism WOW" campaign will unveil over the next year. I give you... The Buddy Christ. ⁱⁱNow that's not the sanctioned term we're using for the symbol, just something we've been kicking around the office, but look at it. Doesn't it... pop? Buddy Christ...

Maybe you have heard the old joke, God made us in God's image. Then we returned the favor. "Buddy Christ" might be an idea for making Christ cool or a marketing ploy to attract others because suffering Jesus on a Cross just doesn't "sell."

Looking at Scripture today, Jesus tells us that he no longer calls us servants, but friends. While Buddy Christ could be kind of fun. Jesus calls us "friends" and brings a deeper meaning. I do not think Buddy Christ is what Jesus had in mind.

I imagine the disciples would be listening to Jesus' farewell speech which is a very long teaching. By this time, their eyes are beginning to glaze over. They hear Jesus, but maybe do not get all that he is saying. There is a reason the disciples have been called the Duh-sicles. But I do not blame them. Jesus has shared a Passover feast with them and told them he will leave, suffer, die, and be raised again. Then after the supper Jesus rises from the table and wraps a towel around him. He pours water into a basin and begins to wash the disciple's feet. He demonstrates God's love for them. He gives them one of the great commandments to Love ONE ANOTHER as I have loved you.

He tells them to be servants to wash one another's feet as he has done. Perhaps they are just getting their heads wrapped around that idea of being servants when a Jesus appears to change his mind. Listen again to what we read today in Chapter 15

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.

Can you imagine their dismay? Jesus, their Teacher and Master, is now calling them one of the most beautiful words we know, "Friend."

From follower to servant to friend. Jesus is speaking a language they knew very well. In the Greco-Roman world friendship was one of the highest virtues. Jesus was a master at framing. He framed their relationship as friendship because it was exactly that- a mutual loving relationship. Mind you, friendship in the Greco-Roman world wasn't people of similar interests having fun together like your tailgate friends or your golf buddies. Friends, at least as the philosophical ideal would have it, were committed to the care of each other's souls. As Aristotle famously put it, "The opposite of a friend is a flatterer." A friend is then someone who speaks the truth, who builds up your character; you have a shared commitment to helping each other to become good, wise, and holy.

Would you rather be a servant or a friend? Think about it.

A servant does what the master wants. A friend does what their friend wants.

A servant acts out of duty. A friend acts out of care for a friend.

A servant does not know the master. A friend knows the other intimately.

Servant hood is a requirement. Friendship is a gift of grace.

Servants are below masters. Friends are in a reciprocal relationship.

Do you hear the difference? Would you rather be a servant or a friend?

There seems to be a progression from a follower to a servant to the ultimate relationship that of friend. Friendship is a model for how we love one another. You know the saying, -to have a friend, be a friend. Friendship is love in action. It is a decision to act in loving ways, not just a feeling. So in that way a friend does acts of service. I think about my brother Andy whose love language is acts of service. I will never forget that the day before our wedding, he went and mowed the church grounds so it would be as pretty as possible for us.

Just this week I witnessed God working through you as a ministry of friendship.

- One of our elderly church family members has been sick, and I know two of her friends who took the time to care for her, sleeping over at her house, and being a companion taking her to the doctor.
- I witnessed another group of disciples walking alongside a friend who needs extra support. They have helped this friend move and become settled in a new living situation.

Servants obey, but friends love one another as Jesus loves us. The actions of love are service, but the motive is different. Do you see it?

Jesus has been modeling friendship all along. He calls the disciples "my friends" (*philois* Like 12:4 John 15:14). He is called "friend of sinners" (Mt. 11:19, Luke 7:34) and eventually is convicted for taking that kind of care too far. Jesus always ministered through relationships. That is why Jesus calls the Godhead, *Father*, and Jesus is the *Beloved Son*. Familial language is about a relationship of mutual love. Obedience is inspired by love, not duty. The more we show love and act lovingly, we will be obey Jesus' command to love. And that how we know joy- real and complete joy.

This language of friendship seems very different than master-servant, right? or it's more modern equivalent, Leader-follower. There has been much written, very well-intended, about **servant leadership**.

Stephen Covey who is most famous for his book the *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* wrote another book, *The Eighth Habit; from Effectiveness to Greatness* which touts the model of servant-leader. But that model has a downside. It can be used to disempower Christians into thinking they are

simply sheep who follow a Shepherd, namely the Pastor. The business model has made pastors into people who are expected to manage, motivate, organize, and plan for the church. The servant-leader model contributes to the false notion that real ministry is that of the priest, the pastor, the clergy when in fact, biblically speaking, every baptized person is a minister of Christ. That's why when people say, "Well, you are the head of the church," I remind them lovingly, "No, that is Jesus. I do not have that kind of power."

So I wonder if all of us who have been baptized into Christ, ordained as ministers, might consider our mode of operating as a ministry of friendship. What does that look like?

2 Corinthians 5:17-20 is a great example. Paul writes of the ministry of reconciliation. Our new relationship with Christ, calls us to make and mend relationships to be reconcilers. Paul likens us to ambassadors for Christ. We are called out to build relationships for Christ.

It is always through relationships that we are changed. Most of us remember our favorite teacher, coach, covenant partner, pastor, not because of what knowledge they shared, but because they took time to care for us, to know us, to share life together in some way. That is a ministry of friendship. It is so much more than being friendly. Instead we act of Jesus' behalf as one of his friends. The Church is a community of Jesus' friends modeling the love between the Father and the Son.

This means two things:

1. Being a friend of Jesus and taking that friendship to others IS Christian ministry.
2. Friendship with Jesus is not the means by which we achieve salvation- it IS salvation.

That sounds much more like the priesthood of all believers called to serve as people rooted in the Vine, living out the love of God, in a community of faith.

That is real communion!

Now while having Buddy Christ around would be fun, I would much rather be a friend of Jesus.

ⁱ *Dogma*, Lionsgate Films, 1999.



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