

Sermon – 07/05/2006 pm

Fruit-bearing Friends of Jesus

Study Text: John 15:14-17

While living in India we had a lady to help us in the house with the washing, cleaning and cooking. In the absence of washing machines and vacuum cleaners she was a great help. My wife told her what time to come in the morning and what jobs she was to do. ‘Wash the clothes like this and hang them up on the line with pegs’ she would say. The servant lady never did understand about the pegs. And then she was told to wash the dishes in hot water. She never did understand why she had to wash them in hot water for she did not know about pathogenic micro-organisms.

Students sometimes stayed in our house and we would tell them – make yourself at home but just leave the place clean. They were our friends and knew how we lived. Sometimes they would offer to help wash up after a meal. They knew about pathogenic bacteria so were ready to wash up in hot water. Our children were also happy to wash up in hot water for we explained to them how hot water killed the germs.

In the upper room Jesus continued sharing with his disciples, emphasising the importance of keeping his commands. If they did so, especially remembering to love one another, they would abide in his love and would be filled with his joy. And Jesus goes on in this passage to tell them they will be his friends. *You are my friends if you do whatever I command you* (15:14).

Not Servants but Friends

The change from being servants to friends indicates a change in the nature of the relationship between Jesus and his disciples. The change is from a more formal, distant relationship to a more intimate, closer relationship. Such a change was evident as Jesus revealed himself to them in the upper room. Indeed he had shown his love by washing their feet.

It was a change from knowing little about the work of Jesus to knowing all that he could tell them. During the time he was with them, right up until this very last evening, Jesus had told them everything he had heard from his Father (15:15). He kept nothing back. They did not fully understand just now but they would soon.

No longer servants but friends. Under the old covenant Abraham (James 2:23) and Moses (Exodus 33:11) were called friends of God – but only these two. Only to these two did God reveal his plans and purposes in detail. The rest of the people of God were given the Law and told to obey it. Did they know why they could not eat certain foods? Did they know why they had to make sacrifices? They kept these laws not knowing how they pointed forward to Christ (Hebrews 9).

In Jesus’ day the Jews were still keeping these laws without understanding that Jesus had come to fulfil them. They were servants or slaves to the Law, keeping it without knowledge, without understanding of what it all meant. The Law never called anyone friends. It was a matter do this or else. But now Jesus was calling his disciples friends.

In the fullness of time God sent forth his Son...to redeem those who were under the law, that they might receive adoption as sons. You are no longer a slave but a son (Galatians 4:4f). Heirs cannot be slaves, at least not when they are grown up. Being adopted sons of the Father, disciples of Jesus are called friends. Indeed he is not ashamed to call them brothers (Hebrews 2:11).

Still today there are people who not know this truth. They continue to live like slaves under the Law, not knowing this wonderful truth that in Christ they have been redeemed, in Christ they have freedom, and in Christ they one who calls them *My friend*. Do you know this wonderful privilege of being a friend of Jesus? If you sometimes feel that you have no friends always remember these words of Jesus – ‘you are my friend’.

Jesus took on flesh and blood as he shared in humanity. Jesus has so wonderfully humbled himself to this extent. But he still maintained his divinity. As one commentator has noted, Jesus does not say they are to call Jesus ‘friend’. He says *I have called you friends*.

You call me Teacher and Lord, and rightly so said Jesus in this same discourse (13:13). He reminded them after he washed their feet that a servant is not greater than his master/lord. But he also showed them that even as their Lord he could wash their feet. Because of love he could do this. In love Jesus drew them to himself and called them friends.

Jesus was going away. He wanted to leave behind more than just servants. He wanted men whom he could trust, men who were committed to him and to the work of the Father. So calling his disciples ‘friends’, he told them what he was doing and why. He told them all they needed to know – and would later send the Holy Spirit to dwell in them.

Remember the parable about the various servants in Luke 12. Some became lazy or abusive and failed to do their master’s will. *Who then is the faithful and wise servant* (Luke 12:42), who is the one who knows the masters will and does it? Note at the end of this parable Jesus speaks of those who knew the master’s will and those who did not know.

Not Choose But Chosen

From the truth of human responsibility – *you are my friends if you keep my commands* – Jesus turns to the truth of divine election – *you did not choose me but I chose you*. These truths stand side by side as they do throughout Scripture. In case the disciples let the idea of being called friends by Jesus go to their heads, Jesus spoke to their hearts reminding them that by grace he chose them.

He chose them as he chooses all who believe in him. Having been elected unto eternal life, they are also appointed or ‘set apart’ for a particular office. These men would become the apostles, the ‘sent ones’ who would take the gospel to the end of the earth. All the elect are appointed for some task within the kingdom of God. We all have a role in the church which is the body of Christ. To undertake that role we must remain in the body or in the vine.

The vine metaphor comes to the fore again as this section draws to a close. True branches in the vine will bear fruit. Jesus chose them and appointed them *that you should go and bear fruit*, fruit that will last (15:16). What is this fruit? It is fruit that should remain.

It is very easy to get busy in life; busy with work, with studies, with family and so many things. We can even get busy with things in the church. But we need to stop and consider the eternal value of all these things. As the saying goes:

*Only one life, twill soon be past
Only what's done for Christ will last.*

Early in his ministry Jesus met a woman by the well in Samaria. He told her he was the Christ. Just after this revelation his disciples brought him food to eat, but he was not interested in eating. He had more important things on his mind. He said to them – *lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are white for harvest* (John 4:35). He was talking about wheat but about the people who were coming to him, ready to believe in him because of the testimony of the woman.

Is your life different to that of people around you who do not believe in Jesus – or do you do the same things and say the same things? When the fruits of the Spirit are displayed in your life you will be different to the world. You will be a living witness for Jesus Christ. Your works and your words will lead others to believe in Jesus to the glory of God.

Men and women, boys and girls who are born again of the Spirit of God – this is fruit that remains. It is fruit that endures into eternity. There is rejoicing in heaven over when one precious soul is saved.

The focus here is upon evangelism and mission writes Carson. ‘As in John’s day, so now: this is simultaneously a mandate to Christ’s followers and a summons to those who do not yet know him. That is why the union of love that joins believers with Jesus can never become a comfortable, exclusivistic huddle that only they can share’. It always ‘seeks to bring others into its orb’.

It all comes back to obedience and prayer. Jesus stresses these two things as he reveals himself to his disciples in the upper room. Obey my commands – *love one another as I have loved you* – and you will abide in Jesus, you will have joy in you heart, and you will be the friend of Jesus.

Be faithful in prayer. Abiding in Jesus you may ask whatever you wish in his name and the Father will give it to you (15:16). Jesus made this amazing promise. The question is, are you faithful in prayer. Do you believe that Jesus intercedes for you? Do you believe the Father hears you? There is nothing here about praying to Mary or any so-called saint. Don’t think your prayer will be heard if you pray in their name.

Ask God to give you words to say, ask him to strengthen you by the Holy Spirit, pray for particular people, pray for all people to hear the Gospel. Remember; abide in the vine for as Jesus said *without me you can do nothing*.

Rev. Dr. Dennis K. Muldoon