

John 15:9-17

May 9, 2021

Grace and peace be with you from God our Father and our risen Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

What is love?

What is friendship?

How would you define those terms today?

You would think it's pretty easy to define, but I sat in on a meeting on Tuesday and realized that they really aren't that easy to define anymore. Not everyone agrees.

Maybe we've just made it too complicated. We tend to do that, right? It seems to be a human thing to over think everything – including love and friendship.

So. On Tuesday, I was at a meeting with Lutheran clergy and we were talking about today's gospel reading. I thought I was friends with one of the people in the group, but then he went on to say he has no friends. I sat there kind of stunned, because I thought we were friends, but evidently we have different definitions of what it means to be a friend.

I guess I have a very open idea of who is a friend, because I basically think I'm everyone's friend once I've gotten to know them. An acquaintance is someone I know only in passing, I know who they are and they probably know who I am. But if I know someone, we've spent any amount of time together, then they are a friend.

We'll have to talk about this later during coffee hour. Maybe there is a difference between extroverts and introverts, or generations, or I don't know what?

Something for us to ponder.

But, for me, a friend is someone who is not out to kill me or hurt me in any way. That's pretty simple, right? It even matches the definition on dictionary.com.

Jesus, however, per usual, flips the whole idea of friend from how we feel about other people to what we would be willing to do for them. What we would be willing to do.

Would we die for that other person? A real friend is someone that we would die for.

Death. That's love. That's friendship.

It's not what they do for us, but what we are willing to do for them that makes them our friend. Are we willing to die? That is the ultimate expression of friendship and love. HmMMM.

So... Maybe I don't have any real friends after all. How about you? Can you think of anyone you would be willing to die for? Do you love anyone so much that you would give them your life?

What a friend we have in Jesus! We are Jesus' friends, because he dies for us. He gives up his life for us. That's love. That's friendship. Jesus acts on our behalf. And it's not just us, but all people, even those who put him on the cross.

Friendship is our willingness to act for others. It's not based on our feelings for them because of what they have done for us. Friendship is our action, and as we all know, you can only control our own actions. So, our friends are those we love enough to place their lives ahead of our own. They don't even have to consider us to be their friend.

Jesus doesn't call us servants, those who have to do his will or suffer, but friends. We are Jesus' friends. We are the people he dies for. Friendship is a relationship of love. Servanthood is hierarchical and based on punishment or reward.

We are not Jesus' servants. We are Jesus' friends. We are the beloved of God.

Jesus lies down his life for us, but it doesn't end there with Jesus. Because it is relational, we are called to continue Jesus' work here and now. We are called to respond to God's love with love for one another. We are called to be other people's friends.

We are called to love, not serve. The difference being that love tears down all levels of hierarchy and puts us all together with Jesus at the cross.

No one is better than anyone else. No one has more prestige. Love is love. It's not a competition. We all just love in different ways, and that's as it should be, because we also receive love in different ways.

Love isn't just an emotion, love is action. When we love, we do something that shows it. Love cannot be contained.

It could be in making a phone call or baking cookies. It could be in helping someone clean their yard or driving them to a doctor's appointment. It could be embroidering a dish towel or saying a prayer. It could be any number of things that puts another person ahead of ourselves.

Anytime we put the wellbeing of someone else in front of our own, we love. Anytime we take our gifts of time and talent, and give them to someone else, they are our friends.

Laying down our lives doesn't mean that we literally have to die, to be killed, but that we give a bit of ourselves to someone else. That's love. That's friendship.

So maybe the definition of love and friendship isn't really that complicated after all. They go hand in hand, and it happens a lot more than any of us probably realize. Perhaps we even take it for granted because it comes so naturally to us. With the Holy Spirit, it has been implanted in us.

How we treat others defines them as our friend. Anyone we care about in any form is our friend – even the person for whom we just opened a door.

Friendship isn't defined by the other person. It is defined by us, so it doesn't really matter if they acknowledge us as their friend or not. Friendship is what we make of it. And when we love others as Jesus has loved us, Jesus is our friend. Through the Holy Spirit, Jesus is in every person we meet, so when we love anyone with acts of life, we love Jesus.

As you know, today is Mother's Day and not a one of us would be here without a mother. We all needed a womb in which to grow. That's an amazing act of love! What a friend we have in our mothers.

And when we think of the empty tomb, we should also think of God as our mother, birthing us to new life through Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection. The crucifixion being the birth pangs and the resurrection being our birth to eternal life in and with God.

Jesus laid down his life for us, his friends, and then he picked it back up again for us as well, so that we will never be afraid to be a friend and to love one other. You can't kill love. Love is life. Friends know that.

We are not Jesus' servants. We are his friends. May he be ours as well.

Thanks be to God. Amen.