

## PASTORAL PRAYER

Gracious loving God, who loves us like a faithful father, who cares for us like a beloved mother, we give you thanks today for examples that have turned to you. We thank you for the mothers who have loved us in the image of your love for us. We celebrate and seek to pass on the love that has been passed onto us. But, Gracious God, we are mindful of those who greet this holiday not with love and celebration but mourning. Many have not had the blessing of a mother who loved them, who was there for them when they needed it, or departed from this world too soon. Many have wanted to become mothers but were unable to. Many women live and serve with the love of mothers but are not celebrated. God, in our celebrations, we are mindful of this grief. Let us care for them with the compassion and care that they deserve as children of God. We lift up the examples of mothers and mother-like women, and we lift up those who lacked those examples equally that you may be our center of compassion that will lead us into the world, Holy One.

In the times of need and when times are plenty, let us turn to our Lord and Savior, the one we lift up and the one we call friend, Jesus Christ. We seek to follow his commandments, for they are not burdensome; they lead us to love one another and Christ in turn. Help us, in this complicated and often difficult world, to turn to this example of loving relationship in the one we call "friend" to guide us along the way. We lift our needs and our concerns to you, God, as we pray as our Lord, Savior, and friend taught us, saying...

## SERMON

Do you have that one friend that you can do anything with? The one friend that will be there by your side no matter what? Do you have that one friend that will call you out when you know you are lying to yourself or to them? That's an incredible gift, for there are

many times we experience that friend for a while only to have them take a different path in life and live far elsewhere. Sometimes they are beside you for a lifetime. Today, we hear someone calling us “friend,” and it is a friendship that carries us into new territory. The calling and the character of God has been opened to us in a new and dramatic way through this friendship, and our lives will never be the same again.

Last week, we looked at some scriptures about the nature of God. This week, we turn to how the continuation of these scriptures tell us more about what the nature of God looks like in the person of Jesus Christ. We can say so many things about Jesus Christ: Lord, Savior, Son of God, Man, God, Sinless, Lamb of God, and so many, many more. We think we know what he looks like, as the picture we see around our church has become synonymous with his name. But how do we relate to him? How do we live in the footsteps of this man who lived two-thousand years ago but we testify lives on in the world today? As John 15 puts it, Jesus Christ is the True Vine and calls us to abide in him. This week, we see how this works out more in our lives when he gives us a new title. Let’s return to our discussion from last week, look at the scriptures of John and 1 John for this week, and find some application for our lives and for this Mother’s day in the ultimate example of love as we now carry the title and responsibility of “friend.”

Last week, we said we can’t put the nature of God purely into words. There’s the transcendent, far-up and high God beyond our understanding and the imminent, close, intimate God who is always with us. The categories tend to fall short, not able to grasp the entire picture. God cannot be described well; God must be lived. We must experience God by abiding in God and through living with God’s values in order to start to get the picture. The #1 value, emphasized over and over again in scripture, is love: love of God, love of

neighbor, faithfully loving one's self. That love is experienced through relationship: with God, with one another. These are very clear in scriptures from John and 1 John. Now, we take it a new direction. We sharpen the focus where we see Jesus as the representative of these ways of God speaking of himself as the True Vine and God described as love. We must abide, we must feed upon the love of God as seen and experienced in Jesus Christ, to find abundant life. From there, we can be vessels that overflow that love into the world. Today we have new questions: How do we faithfully relate to this Jesus Christ that we always talk about day after day? We once again pick up on those characteristics that live on in our understanding of God, for they flow through Jesus Christ as well in a unique way. We call him "friend." It's this basic fact that we proclaim each year at Christmas: Jesus is Emmanuel, which means God with us. And Jesus is "God with us" in a very unique way.

Let's pick a few words to outline the journey. How do we relate to Jesus? First of all, Jesus is: friend. It's more complex than we might think when we first hear that word. It can sound too easy. The most striking part of this section of the "True Vine" passage is how Jesus describes how this new kind relationship is forming with his people. This is during his final discourse before his betrayal in Jerusalem. "I do not call you servants any longer...but I have called you friends..." Friendship is a key component in any kind of relationship, whether that be a co-worker, one of your best friends, or a spouse. You can't work together well unless at least the basics of friendship are at hand. This is a good image when we think about it well. Friendship, we can think, is often about those who love you and let you do whatever you want. On the other hand, think about your relationship with your good friends, and we can get a better picture. Friendship requires trust, time, respect, among other things. You don't put on airs when you are with your friends; you are free to

be exactly who you are. When you truly ask for forgiveness, they will be the ones first in line to forgive you. Friends are full of love. There is honesty. "I have called you friends," he says, "because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father." On the other hand, friends are also full of accountability. When you mess up, your true friends will tell you about it. When you don't live up to your standards, they will be the first to call you out on it. They know you the best, maybe even better than yourself. They will let you know when something is going wrong or when something just isn't right. They will call you out when you are not being honest with them or yourself. It's both freeing and difficult when you have that level of accountability because it forces you to be honest with yourself.

But the greatest principle is the most difficult. In this true friendship, there is self-sacrifice. Jesus is the ultimate example of friendship by this simple quote: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." We know of Jesus' sacrifice. But at the same time, we know friendship is reciprocal. If you want a friend, you gotta be a friend, and there is nothing less than this for our friendship with Christ. What wouldn't you do for one of your true friends? We are called to do the same for Christ. Honesty and accountability are crucial, but we are also called to give up our own desires for the greater principle. As we said before, this isn't necessarily a call to give our lives to God, but it is a call to devote ourselves to these principles we see in Jesus Christ. If we expect Christ to be "friend," as he has called us, it requires the same response of us.

Most of all, Jesus is...the key example of relationship to us all. Last week, that was the point, and it is again this week: God's very nature is relationship, and we were created for the same thing. There is no way to really sum up the Trinity beyond that fact with what we know in this world. The Trinity is the key example of relationship: three persons living

with one nature, and the binding force is love. Jesus is the person in that relationship that comes to be in relationship with us. The blessedness, the incredible truth of the incarnation, which is God come to earth as a human being, is that it is God coming to live in relationship with us in a new and dramatic way. That relationship is twofold: it's about God coming to know what it means to be a human being, and it's about us coming to know God even more through our relationship with Jesus Christ. That is the truth of the True Vine: we come to know God more and what God asks of us as Jesus Christ comes to live in and with us. It is nothing short of a miracle, and it paves the way for us to be God's people in a new and miraculous way.

Our passage from 1 John gives us the heart of abiding with the one we now call friend. "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God, and everyone who loves the parent loves the child." When we abide in Christ, we abide in God because they reside in the same being and follow the same mission. But the message extends beyond that. When we call Christ "friend," we gain a part of a whole other realm of friendship, a whole other family. When we love God and Christ, we love God's children, which is the church. "Everyone who loves the parent loves the child." It has become a command, but with this love, it is never a burden. We are called to be those hands and feet that love the family of God near and far, and we do so lovingly and joyfully while abiding in Christ. When Jesus calls us friend, it means that we are now interconnected with the greater church across time, space, and the ages. Christ changed a lot when he called us "friend," for the implications are not just about ourselves and Jesus but how we now relate to all those in Christ's world. It's a big mission, but we never do it alone. We have the one

who taught us to lead the way, but it is our task to continue to follow, continue to carry that banner of love and compassion.

The bottom line is that all these characteristics of God we find shined renewed in the figure of Jesus Christ and the way he calls us “friend.” It takes special meaning on this day which brings joy or pain, depending on your life’s story. On this Mother’s Day, when we celebrate mothers and recognize and remember those who have trouble celebrating the holiday. Some lacked mothers that loved them, some are women who cannot become mothers, some choose not to become mothers, and some are mothers in every way except biologically. Ultimately, we remember the root of this day is love, and this is best seen in the love in relationship that was shown in Jesus Christ. Jesus’ example of relationship is the caring example of mothers, for he attends to those who celebrate today and those whose hearts are empty by those celebrations they cannot take part in for many reasons. Jesus Christ knows those things that burden us and those things that uplift us, and he cries and celebrates with us in those needs. That is the role of not only a friend but the one who loves us like a faithful parent and abides with us as we seek to abide in him. Our mission is to be like Jesus in celebrating the joys and uplifting the broken and hurting, for we are friend and family to all with those needs on this day.

Jesus Christ, the True Vine, God’s Son, the example of relationship to us all, is a character that we can barely touch in one sermon. Thousands of pages in scripture and billions of pages throughout history have been devoted to this human being who was more than human, this member of the Trinity who came to be with us in a new and radical way. Even the word “friend” is a difficult one to understand with Jesus, but the calling is not. We, therefore, come to live and be with one another in the love that Jesus showed among us,

calling us “friend” and making us family. Because Jesus is friend, all the world is where we do mission. Let us abide in him, letting our belief in him fuel a life of faithfulness, as he seeks to abide in us, and we will be changed, to be more like him in all parts of our lives. Let us do so faithfully each and every day. Thanks be to God! Amen and Amen.