

6th Sunday of Easter—Year B

John 15:9-17

May 9, 2021

Alleluia! Christ is risen! Christ is risen, indeed! Alleluia! Amen!

Do you recognize these lyrics? *“When you’re down and troubled and you need a helping hand; and nothing is going right; close your eyes and think of me and soon I will be there; to brighten up even your darkest nights. You just call out my name, and you know wherever I am; I’ll come running to see you again. Winter, spring, summer, or fall; all you got to do is call and I’ll be there. You’ve got a friend.”* These are the lyrics to the song simply entitled, “You’ve Got a Friend”, which was written and recorded by Carole King for her Tapestry album by Carole King in 1971. James Taylor, in the same year, then released it as a single, taking it to #17 on Billboard’s top songs for 1971. The reassuring, timeless messages of friendship having no boundaries and a friend being there when you are in need have universal appeal no matter our age.

Friends. Normally we get “a warm fuzzy feeling” when we think about a friend, right? After all, isn’t a friend someone who shares common interests and beliefs, who listens to and helps out, who does stuff with us and looks out for our best interests, who shares our sorrows and our joys? Isn’t a friend someone with whom a disagreement doesn’t threaten the relationship, and above all, someone who loves us, warts and all?

Who automatically comes to mind as a friend? Who would call you their friend? A life partner? A person from your childhood who knows not only you but your entire family? Those you play cards or eat ice cream with on a weekly basis, text daily, or hang on the phone with for hours?

In our gospel lesson today, Jesus tells his disciples of all time, *“I do not call you servants any longer but I have called you friends.”* Jesus – our Savior and Lord, the Messiah, the Son of God – calls us his friends! These are some of the last words Jesus will speak to his disciples. The disciples have been told by Jesus that he will be put to death more than once. But just because they know he will be killed does not make the pain, confusion, emptiness, and even the anger go away.

The disciples need the comfort of Jesus. They need to be reassured that when everything they’ve depended on goes away, when everyone has abandoned them, when their worlds are falling apart, the love of Jesus remains. They need to hear this message of deep and abiding love not just once, but over and over again. The words Jesus chooses are, *“I call you friends”*. These are words of reassurance. Words of love.

It’s been said that there are three categories of friends: friends for a reason – those we take a swim or quilting class with; friends for a season – confidants who helped us

through a career change or gave motherly advice as we raised our children; and friends for a lifetime – those who are always there, no matter how long it's been since the last communication or the distance between. What kind of friends are we to others, to Jesus? Are we in for the long haul, or are we "fair weather" friends, only when it's convenient for us? Which category do we claim?

We are not perfect people, and consequently, not perfect friends. We deny our friend Jesus' presence in others, especially those with different viewpoints, skin color, and beliefs. We betray our friend Jesus when turning our backs on the vulnerable and invisible of society. We bail out on our friend Jesus as we do what is easy, popular, and convenient for us, let alone what is in our best interests, instead of considering what is right and just for everyone.

The good news for us this morning is that even when we fall short of being a friend to Jesus, and others, Jesus still considers us his friends! He is the kind of friend who walks with us to the mountaintops and through the valleys of our lives. He is the kind of friend who forgives us when we cause harm to his fellow friends. He is the kind of friend who has always had our best interests at heart, doing the hard and impossible for us to do work to restore our relationship with God. The cross shows us!

Jesus tells us that we can not earn his friendship. On top of that we can not lose his friendship, either. Through his resurrection, God in Jesus Christ has guaranteed that the friendship he has initiated with us is one that lasts for eternity. Marked with the cross of Christ, we have been chosen in the waters of our baptism to be friends of Jesus Christ. He assures us that *"as the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love"* and, in doing so, experience the same joy that he has experienced with his, and our, Father. In our chosenness we have been given the privilege to invite others into the same kind of relationship we've been given – a relationship with Jesus of deep, mutual and abiding love, where God's love flows through us and then from us to God's beloved creation, all because God has FIRST loved us.

When the world has left us, when our relationships have been severed, when it feels like there is nothing left, Jesus will still be with us. Carole King's song concludes with the words, *"Ain't it good to know that you've got a friend?"* Thanks be to God we can answer, "yes, it is good to know that we've got a friend" in Jesus. He is our BFF, our best friend ever! Alleluia! Christ is risen. Christ is risen indeed. Alleluia!