

1 Sermon, September 19, 2010

Texts: Luke 5:17-25, Proverbs 27:6-10

Title: "Honoring the Friend in You"

1. The Bible holds friends in high esteem.
2. Jesus praised friends who did damage to his property
Mark says Jesus was at his home when this happened.
3. Friendship is costly
4. Friendship means truth
5. Friendship is beautiful

1. The Bible holds friends in high esteem.

When I planned out this sermon, it was to be a part of a series about the hidden parts of ourselves that we need to honor. Last week was to be the innocence of a child, this week the loyalty of a friend, and next week the spiritual longing of a mystic.

Well, that was before I studied the Scripture, and what I found was deeper than I thought. So when I looked at these Bible texts, I found that Proverbs considers friendship as important as family in some cases. I found that Jesus regarded the faith of friends as sufficient grounds for healing. Friends were held in high esteem in the Bible.

2. Jesus praised friends who did damage to his property

I remember the passage from Luke being acted out during an ecumenical Vacation Bible School by an Assemblies of God pastor. He got a ladder and some saw horses and a saw, and while he was telling the story he climbed up on the ladder and sawed through a sheet of something lighter weight than plywood, until there was a hole in it, and it dropped on the floor.

It is a dramatic story, but the sawing through the roof is not what Jesus noticed. Jesus noticed the *friendship* of the men who let their paralyzed friend through the roof.

The gospel of Mark says that Jesus was at his own home when this happened. Yes, Jesus had a house in Capernaum – maybe he was just part owner, maybe a renter, we don't know.

But when Jesus was teaching and healing and the crowds were too big, his friends couldn't get in, so they ripped a hole in the roof.

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The gospel of Mark says there were four friends, so you can imagine them working together to make a hole big enough to let a man down.

Now, the gospels differ as to what the roof was made of, and it may have been mostly branches, smaller sticks and mud. An earthen roof would help keep a house cool in that climate.

The roof was probably pretty flat, because people often put a small guest room up on the roof.

But anyway, Jesus didn't seem to be bothered by the property damage. Instead, he praised the paralyzed man's friends, and healed the man, and forgave his sin.

I'm sure that the friends were just as overjoyed as the man who was healed.

3. Friendship is costly

The story from Luke reminds us that friendship is costly. Those four men, in doing what they did could have received ridicule, lawsuits, disapproval by Jesus, failure of their mission, wrenched backs, arguments, you name it. It would have been a *lot* easier to just stay home.

Their love for their friend meant going out on a limb. It was a risk. When you are a friend, it means stepping out of the safety zone.

Years back, when I was 22 or 23 years old and living in Baltimore, I went into the library of the Peabody Institute. There I met a woman named Liz, who was probably twice my age. She offered to get together with me, saying: "My doctor says I need friends."

Now, Liz was a plain woman, frail for her age, with tremors in her hands, and she openly admitted that she regularly saw a psychiatrist. I'm sure many people would have not wanted to enter into a friendship with Liz, because they felt they had nothing in common, or might just be afraid of someone with such evident problems.

But I was curious. I had never met anyone like Liz, so we began a friendship that lasted, at least by correspondence, until she died about ten years ago.

I found Liz to be a Jewel of a person. She really had the desire to *be* a friend. She took me out to eat several times, she told me wonderful stories, and she listened to my concerns. I was far away from home, and I was lonely, too. Liz also gave very gentle advice, which was mostly in the form of honest questions, that helped me think through things.

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If Liz hadn't been willing to take a risk with me, my life would have been poorer for it. Friendship is costly.

Some years ago there was an episode on the television series *Wonder Years* in which basketball teams were chosen in a physical education class. The teacher chose two captains, who then chose their respective teams.

Naturally, the poor players were picked last. Some of Kevin's friends, who were usually among those chosen last, complained to Kevin, and he in turn complained to the teacher. The next time the class played basketball, the teacher named Kevin as one of the team captains. Now he had to choose a team. His best friend, who was also one of the worst players, looked at Kevin eagerly. Would Kevin choose him in the early rounds, or would he choose him last like all the other captains?

Kevin chose his friend in the first round. In the next round he chose another poor-playing friend. And in spite of protests from even some of his already-chosen friends, Kevin continued to pick losers for his team. When the game was played, the team did miserably. They didn't even come close to winning. But they enjoyed the game.

Friendship is costly. It may make us look foolish, it may stretch our emotional, physical and financial resources.

There was a news story last week about two Oklahoma men, Robert Pittman and John Zeigler. The men have been friends since they attended an Edmond Oklahoma middle school together. Zeigler, an Edmond police officer, gave Pittman, of Broken Arrow, a kidney in a five-hour surgery in Tulsa last month. The men are recovering. Pittman, the one who needed the kidney, said "Words can't describe a person who gives you your life back, (Zeigler) is one of a kind."

Zeigler, 41, describes his relationship with Pittman as that of brothers. The decision to help a friend came easy once Pittman started having problems, he said.

"When I considered the risk versus the reward, the reward outweighed what could happen to me," Zeigler said. Zeigler insisted in March he be tested to determine if they were a match.

"We never hit a roadblock," Pittman said. "All the tests came out positive. We were a positive match." Doctors found four of the six DNA markers matched, something that isn't always found even among siblings, Pittman said.

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Zeigler said he turned to his faith for guidance through the process. He said God opened all the doors so he could see clearly about his decision.

Friendship is costly. And that is especially true in our mobile society. When you move from town to town, it's much easier to have acquaintances than true friends.

Part of the cost of friendship is time. We have to take time in order to be a friend, and people are so *busy*. You have to slow down to be a friend. I'm an example of someone who is busy, but my friend, Karl, keeps calling every now and then, and reminding us to get together. I value that so much.

4. Friendship means truth

Friendship is costly. And one of the biggest costs is when we have to tell our friend something that we know they don't want to hear.

Friends tell the truth in love, and that is a very hard thing to do.

I remember back in my first pastoral appointment, when a man named Al, just a few years older than me, met me to tell me my preaching had gotten much worse lately. He didn't just come to my home or office, he invited me someplace neutral, where there would be privacy.

Al was right, I had gotten into a funk with my preaching. It hurt to hear that, but it was also sort of a relief. It helped me get out of my slump and work on my sermons in a different way.

Proverbs 27:6 says, "You can trust a friend who corrects you, but kisses from an enemy are nothing but lies."

We know someone is a friend when they not only tolerate our eccentricities, but tell us in love that we should change.

5. Friendship is beautiful

I've talked about the cost of friendship, but the blessings are even greater. When, in today's gospel reading, Jesus praised the friends of the paralyzed man, he praised them for their *faith*.

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Basically, the four men believed in Jesus' power to heal, and they believed in their friend, too. This kind of belief is really very close to trust. It's not just believing that something is factual; it's believing that something is precious.

The four friends believed that God was at work in Jesus. They also valued the paralyzed man so much, they thought so much of what it would be like for their friend to be healed, that they were willing to take all sorts of action to get him healed.

That kind of friendship is a beautiful thing. Let's try to *be* friends, thinking the best of the other, and be willing to pay the cost of friendship. We will find there is much to rejoice about.

Amen!

Proverbs 27:6-10 (Contemporary English Version)

7If you have had enough to eat, honey doesn't taste good, but if you are really hungry, you will eat anything.

8When you are far from home, you feel like a bird without a nest.

9The sweet smell of incense can make you feel good, but true friendship is better still.

10Don't desert an old friend of your family or visit your relatives when you are in trouble. A friend nearby is better than relatives far away.

Luke 5:17-25 (The Message)

17One day as he was teaching, Pharisees and religion teachers were sitting around. They had come from nearly every village in Galilee and Judea, even as far away as Jerusalem, to be there. The healing power of God was on him.

18-20Some men arrived carrying a paraplegic on a stretcher. They were looking for a way to get into the house and set him before Jesus. When they couldn't find a way in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof, removed some tiles, and let him down in the middle of everyone, right in front of Jesus. Impressed by their bold belief, he said, "Friend, I forgive your sins."

21That set the religion scholars and Pharisees buzzing. "Who does he think he is? That's blasphemous talk! God and only God can forgive sins."

22-26Jesus knew exactly what they were thinking and said, "Why all this gossipy whispering? Which is simpler: to say 'I forgive your sins,' or to say 'Get up and start walking'? Well, just so it's clear that I'm the Son of Man and authorized to do either, or both. . . ." He now spoke directly to the paraplegic: "Get up. Take your bedroll and go home." Without a moment's hesitation, he did it—got up, took his blanket, and left for home, giving glory to God all the way. The people rubbed their eyes, incredulous—and then also gave glory to God. Awestruck, they said, "We've never seen anything like that!"

Luke 5:17-25 (Contemporary English Version)
(Matthew 9.1-8; Mark 2.1-12)

17One day some Pharisees and experts in the Law of Moses sat listening to Jesus teach. They had come from every village in Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem.

God had given Jesus the power to heal the sick, **18**and some people came carrying a crippled man on a mat. They tried to take him inside the house and put him in front of Jesus. **19**But because of the crowd, they could not get him to Jesus. So they went up on the roof, where they removed some tiles and let the mat down in the middle of the room. **20**When Jesus saw how much faith they had, he said to the crippled man, "My friend, your sins are forgiven."

21The Pharisees and the experts began arguing, "Jesus must think he is God! Only God can forgive sins."

22Jesus knew what they were thinking, and he said, "Why are you thinking that? **23**Is it easier for me to tell this crippled man that his sins are forgiven or to tell him to get up and walk? **24**But now you will see that the Son of Man has the right to forgive sins here on earth." Jesus then said to the man, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk home."

25At once the man stood up in front of everyone. He picked up his mat and went home, giving thanks to God.