

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

May 6, 2018
Sixth Sunday of Easter, Year B

The readings this week:

- Acts 10:44-48 ◦ Psalm 98
- 1 John 5:1-6 ◦ John 15:9-17

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

I like how Jesus came to call his disciples “friends.” I doubt if he would have been able to do that when they were first hanging out together. But over time, all relationships change.

‘This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.’ [from John 15]

A few months ago I was eating pizza with some of the church’s youth at a Sunday night service and I asked them what it means to be a friend. I wrote down all the definitions, because they were better than any I would come up with. “A friend is someone who is herself.” “A friend is nice.” “A friend cares about you, listens to your problems, and helps you.” “A friend thinks about you before he thinks about himself.” “A friend cares about other people’s opinions and beliefs, and respects them.”

I notice that all these definitions describe how a person acts, not just how she feels or what she says. The worst kind of friend is the kind who says he cares about you, but whose actions show indifference, or worse.

If this saying of Jesus, which is set on the night of his arrest, is about the church to come, then I think one thing is both obvious and interesting: people in the church ought to be friends. Friends are people who can count on each other, who say positive things about and to one another. The problem is, of course, that not all churches are places where friends are in abundance.

I know a woman who’s been super involved in churches for over 20 years. Recently she started attending Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. There,

she says, she discovered the “church” she’d always been seeking. Her AA friends listen without judgment and, when she’s under stress, they simply call to check on her.

This may not be easy. Love can get tired. Our ability to love everyone is limited. None of us does it perfectly.

But God has a store of love from which we can draw when we have exhausted our own resources. And so we just keep trying.

We’ve been friended already. Now we just have to friend others.

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We all long for heaven where God is, but we have it in our power to be in heaven with Him at this very moment. But being happy with Him now means:

*Loving as He loves,
Helping as He helps,
Giving as He gives,
Serving as He serves,
Rescuing as He rescues,
Being with Him twenty-four hours,
Touching Him in his distressing disguise.*

-Mother Teresa of Calcutta 1910-1997

Reflecting on the Word



___ 1st Reading: [Acts 10:44-48](#)

The vision alone was not enough to help Peter completely understand God's point. What else was required? If Peter believed that God was God of the Jews only, what parts of Cornelius' story would have been surprising to him (verses 30-33)? God did not tell Peter why he was going to Cornelius' house. Do you think Peter realized what might happen there? Compare verses 10:44-46 with the story of Pentecost in Acts 2:1-4. What are the similarities? What differences? Why would it be important that the Gentile believers have nearly the exact same experience as the Jewish believers? Can you think of any experiences like this in your own life, when the Holy Spirit has drawn you closer to believers who are different from you? What ways does God break down barriers today between groups of Christian believers, or between believers and non-believers? [Faith Element](#)

___ Psalm Reading: [Psalm 98](#)

Where do Christians find their joy? Note: the word "salvation" in the NIV could also be translated "victory"> What are the "marvelous things" that the writer would have been referring to which have worked salvation/victory for the Lord? Why does the Lord do these marvelous things? In what ways might we rob the Lord of the credit he deserves for the salvation/victory that he has achieved? In what situations might a person "shout for joy"? When was the last time you felt like this? What should such feelings be based upon? What is nature so excited about according to these verses? What does it mean to be "in tune with nature" according to the Bible? Do you yearn for the outcomes mentioned in v9 with the same joy and anticipation? How should this be reflected in our prayer lives? What might stop us from sharing this joy? [Springwood Anglican Church](#)

Praying Toward Sunday

It takes little faith to see the sacred in the extraordinary.

To have faith the sacred is in the ordinary, though,
takes courage to believe the mundane can be enough;
that grace can emerge
even through the dull,
the slightly disappointing,
the not quite right,
not quite as we intended,
not really what we hoped;
the clumsy,
the awkward,
and the imperfect.

Let your act of faith be
to let what you do be enough.
Let what you do be enough...

~ Cheryl Lawrie, [\[hold this space\]](#)

Because it is the last Sunday before Ascension Day, the texts of the sixth Sunday of Easter in effect become "the last words" of the resurrected Jesus to his friends. Jesus, about to ascend to heaven, leaves this instruction: "Love one another as I have loved you."

As I have loved you: radical love of enemies, the poor, tax collectors, sinners, prostitutes, lepers; the relentless challenges to the righteous and pious, truth telling, table overturning, and finally cross bearing and death embracing, laying down his life for his friends.

It makes me want to hide under my desk.

I'd feel better if Jesus really ascended far away into heaven, remotely busying himself at the "right hand of the Father." Unfortunately, the enthronement takes place within our own hearts.

Loving one another as he loved us, is, indeed a most intimate commandment.

~ Suzanne Guthrie, [At the Edge of Enclosure](#)

___ 3rd Reading: [1 John 5:1-6](#)

How are our love for God and obedience to his commandments related to the love we give others? Do you find God's commandments burdensome? Why or why not? (See Matthew 11:30.) How is obeying God out of love different from obeying him out of fear? How are we capable of overcoming the temptations and sins of the world? The theme of our study is "Love One Another." How does this week's passage relate to John's big idea and his hope for Jesus' Church? [Mark Driscoll](#)

___ 4th Reading: [John 15:9-17](#)

What does it mean to be a "friend" of Jesus? How could this be taken wrongly? How does Jesus describe the love He has for us as His disciples? How is the Father's love connected to Jesus' love? How is Jesus' love tied to our love? How should we response to the Father's love through Jesus? Do you think it is possible for someone to fulfill Christ's commands in this passage apart from God's power? What are two reasons why our Lord Jesus commands us to render obedience to His commandments? What do you suppose full joy feels like? What specific commandment does our Lord present to His disciples in verses 12-13? What is He really telling them about Himself? Our choice of friends say a lot about who we are. How can we attract the right people and develop healthy friendships? What is one step you can take in order to be a better friend? [Redeemer Lutheran Church](#)