

"Chosen as Friends."

Acts 10:34-44; Ps. 98; John 15:1-17

Rev. David E. Young

Chapel Lane Presbyterian Church

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When the fishermen saw Jesus walking by the Sea of Galilee did they nudge each other and say, "Hey! He looks like an interesting guy. What do you say we just drop these nets and follow him?"

No. Jesus found them and said: "Follow me." And he has been doing the same thing down through the ages, calling women and men to follow him. Here in John's Gospel he reminds us: "You did not choose me, but I chose you." God calls together a people and we are shaped by our relationship with the Lord and by our participation in Christian Community.

We learn what Jesus is all about and what it means to be in communion with him and in community with one another as we go along. Somewhere along the way a transition occurs. Just as those whom Jesus first called to follow became friends - his friends and friends of one another - so too we participate in this same calling, this same choosing, this same befriending.

In this passage from John's Gospel, Jesus calls his disciples (and each of us) "friends". This is a high calling. Being a friend of God in Christ puts us in heady company. Moses is referred to as a friend of God. When he and the Lord talked face to face during the Exodus they are conversing as friends (Ex. 33:11).

Even earlier, in Genesis, when God debates whether to fill Abraham in on his plan to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, God decides he cannot hide it from Abraham because he has chosen Abraham to live in

righteousness and justice before the Lord. Elsewhere in Scripture, such as in Isaiah 41, Abraham is referred to as "God's friend".

Both in John's Gospel and in important relationships from the Old Testament, friendship is linked to knowledge of what God is doing. Nothing is withheld. Friends of God are clued in to God's purposes and plans. They, in turn, follow in faith and in trust.

But what else do friends do? We know friends don't let friends drive home drunk. What else?

If we were to come up with a list of characteristics of friends, I think these are some of the things that would be on the list: loyalty, support, trust, loving concern, availability, helpfulness, accountability, being "in the know".

When you think of your friends do these words fit the bill? How about when you think of those who are a part of Chapel Lane along with you? When Jesus calls you his "friend" are these the words that come to mind? Do you expect from Jesus the same qualities of friendship you expect from your closest friend?

Proverbs has a thing or two to say about friends: "A true friend sticks closer than one's nearest kin" (18:24); and "A friend loves at all times" (17:17).

Jesus calls us to exhibit to one another and to the world these qualities of friendship and especially the quality of love. The one who commanded the wind and the waves to be still, now calls us into community and commands our love, commands us to love one another.

This is Jesus' legacy among us. Love.

When we are not getting along and when we find the Christian fellowship to be a drag, we need to remember that he did not call us to like one another. We are to love the ones whom Jesus loves, love the things that Jesus loves and to be motivated by our mutual desire to advance the cause of Christ.

Jesus said, "You did not choose me, but I chose you." (John 15:16) Because God has done the choosing (and we have not) could it be that God wants us to be together?

The church and the family have much in common. Just as children do not choose which family they will be born into, so too, as members of the Church of Jesus Christ, we have been called together by God into one body, the Body of Christ.

And one of our hardest and most important tasks is to learn to love one another as Christ loves us. This means that when the blessed "ties that bind" get a little frayed, it is important to work that much harder at restoring the bonds of fellowship between us. We do it for Jesus' sake.

We do it because we are called to bear fruit and we cannot do this if we are caught up in disagreements that dissipate our energy. We cannot do it if we are constantly working at cross-purposes with one another.

Loving one another with the love of Christ means getting ourselves out of the center and placing others there instead. It means practicing a loving concern for others and a willingness to make sacrifices for the needs of others.

When our love is not based on how we feel at any given time, but instead rests on the clear command of Christ, we are led to evaluate the quality of our relationships both in and outside of the church.

If loving one another as Christ loves us became the defining goal of each conversation we had, of every interaction with others, of how we spent our time and our money and our resources, what changes might occur in you and me as a result?

Just how would we treat that telemarketer? Are they too a child of God just as we are?

Christ has chosen us to be friends. Coming together is not up to us, but staying together is. Christ has called us to love one another as he has loved us. And, Christ has appointed us to bear lasting fruit in the world. Working together for Christ has meaning and purpose and staying power in the world.

Friends, let us be about God's work living in the bonds of love and working for justice, peace and reconciliation, here in this place and wherever God calls us to be as his body in the world.

Amen.