

May 10 2015

Scripture Lessons ~

Psalm 98

Acts 10:44-48

John 15:9-17

Sermon *Friends of God*

Friends of God, does it take you by surprise to be called friends of God? Maybe it seems pretty presumptions to identify ourselves in that way, as friends of God. I don't really think so. The last night that Jesus was with his disciples he addressed them in just those same words. "You are my friend if you do what I command you." Again he said, "I have called you friend for all I have heard from my father, I have made known to you." You know, it is not just the Quakers, who can claim the title "The Society of Friends" and that is an appropriate name for the church, itself. I think every place of worship could be known as the meeting house of the society of friends. Friendship in this sense is not something that happens spontaneously and neither is it the result of me or you saying, "I want Jesus as my friend". Instead we hear Jesus making this astounding statement, "You did not choose me, but I choose you. and appointed you." That is the reoccurring wonder of God's amazing grace, God chooses us. Discipleship was not something which Jesus' followers choose, discipleship choose them. Our friendship with Jesus is not based on our personal affection for Jesus but on Jesus' love for us. "As my Father has loved me, so I have loved you," said Jesus.

During my boy's early years, our family relied often times on the same two or three teenagers and one or two adults to watch Shane and Andrew. When we had a church commitment which didn't involved them or when it was just a need to get out and away, since we didn't have family in the area. Shane and Andrew came to depend upon these church friends as did I to be, grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins to our family, These folks provided a stable and predictable and loving environment of an extended family in which Shane and Andrew were able to thrive and grow as small children. Through it all they, I believe, they sensed somehow instinctively that among friends we strive for an atmosphere of openness, sharing, and trust. That is what Jesus is getting at when I have called you friends from all I have heard from my Father, and I have made known to you. God the Creator, and Jesus were one in heart, mind, will, and nothing blocked their communion. In the same way friends they shared themselves, their purposes, they shared their hope, their dreams, and their fears. You get a kick out this name but as Dr. A.J. Gossip once put it, everything that he had, is ours to draw on. It is yours, God said, because it is mine and that is friendship. I think friendship is always a gift. It is a

free gift but it carries its own unique responsibilities as well. Jesus says to his friends, this is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you, that is the calling of Jesus' friends. But somehow, I don't know about you but it grates on me to hear the word love and the word commandment used in the same breathe. The two don't seem to go together. One speaks of the law and other speaks of the Good News of the Gospel. I think it is striking that the Gospel account of Jesus ministry do not report Jesus as giving very many specific what you would call as commandments until that last night with his friends. He was not a commandment-issuing friend. And therefore the new commandment stands out more strikingly when you hear it together. Jesus surely knew we cannot legislate love, we all know that. But in strongest possible way he under scored, the distinguishing mark of his friendship is by reminding each one of us to simply love one another. Jesus also knew our human tendency for division, for dissension, for vindication for in- fighting, and power grabbing even among his friends, even in the church. Beyond that Jesus senses tension, he senses the anxiety, the uncertainty the disciples would feel in that long interlude between the resurrection and the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. His urgent word was to love one another as I have loved you. That would keep Jesus' friends in unity. It would keep them in community and Jesus went on to say, no one had greater love than this that a person lay down his life for his friends. Jesus' love is more than passing out warm fuzzies and warm feelings in our tummy. His love, I think we call a cross-mark, in the very literally sense of the word his life, he laid down his life for his friend, by the way, he laid his life for his enemies as well. All love is worthy of the name love is self-giving, repeated laying down one's life for one who is love, to love is give oneself and to go on giving. There is no me-firstism in love. If our relationships are healthy and if our motivation is clear.

Imez Gozme was the bishop of the tiny church in the country of El Salvador was a small great hearted man, he was in prison, and he was tortured because of his church's ministry to persons that were displaced by war in El Salvador's tragic past. The modern building that houses his congregation was burglarized and bombed, and members of his congregation in prison, they were tortured, they were killed. A pastoral friend was assassinated and then brutally mutilated. Once when he was interviewed, the bishop and his wife were planning for safety sake to send their older children to live with relatives in Mexico. Gozme, himself received repeated death threats because of his ministry and during the interview he was asked, how in the world he could keep going under these circumstances. And he replied very simply, "God has asked us to care for the very least of these and for me that is enough". Few of us are called on literally to lay down our lives in the service of the Kingdom of God. But our calling is always every day to try the best we can to love one another as I have loved you. Even when the cross standing

directly on the horizon, he spoke to his friends his joy, these things are spoken to you that my joy might be in you and your joy may be full.

You know, I doubt that Jesus was very happy on that Maundy Thursday night or during those cruel events which brought him to the time of the cross but I do believe that he experienced inner sense of joy throughout that the whole painful process until, he was able to say, "It is finished". Happiness, as you well know frequently depends on the outward circumstances of life but joy comes inwardly from the set of our soul. Joy is the sense of humble confidence, tranquilly from being a friend of God chosen through Jesus. Strangely enough the early Christians were sometimes referred to as the children of joy. And the Holy Spirit was referred to as the happy spirit. In the power of that happy spirit then we celebrate with joy being the friends of God as we honor those who have been mothers to us on this Mother's Day.

Jesus said, "no longer do I call you servants for the servant does not know what his master is doing but I have called you my friends for all I have heard from my father I have made known to each one of you." Amen