

Mark D. Reichert

Easter 6 – John 15:9-17 – Jesus is Our Best Friend Forever

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Mother's Day is the day for us to gratefully acknowledge that there's nothing in this world like a mother's love. It's the ideal that every other kind of love is compared to. Whether her child is good or bad, young or old, a mother's love always gives, always reaches out, always perseveres. It can be a thankless job – even when a child makes her sick and sore for nine months, constantly cries, complains, whines, fills diapers and who knows what else in the house, throws up, spits up, makes everything dirty and messy and smelly, refuses to do chores, and expects to be served all day every day, a mother's love is a constant. A loving mother is a child's best friend.

There's something built into each of us that needs that kind of deep, selfless love that we get from our moms. Maybe that's why God gave us friends, so that we can have someone to love us and care about us like our moms do, even after we leave the nest. And maybe that's why it's so very meaningful for us when Jesus tells us in our Gospel lesson for today that he made us *his* friends.

In a certain sense, God gave us our moms so that their love could give us a glimpse of what Jesus' love is like. His love for us is selfless, boundless, and highly effective. In fact, Jesus is the best friend anyone could *ever* have in this world. But we didn't seal that relationship with some BFF trinket we hang around our necks that usually gets lost around the same time that formerly best friends grow apart. No, Jesus is our best friend forever because he loved us enough to lay down his life for us.

And that's really remarkable, considering who he is and who we are: *"I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."* You know, *servant* is really much too nice a word to describe the kind of relationship we should have with Jesus. We are by nature enemies of God and slaves to the devil. And every time we badmouth our boss or our parents or our authorities, we're proving it. Every time we're unloving and selfish and thankless, we're showing why we don't even deserve to be *servants* in Jesus' household. We're just like the child who cries and complains and makes a mess of everything, and then expects someone else to clean it up.

And yet, Jesus calls us his friends and says to us, *"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you."* The only thing greater than a mother's love in this world is a Savior's. Jesus' love for us is perfect and gracious. What Jesus accomplished for us in making his bitter

enemies and rebels into his friends forever through faith can't help but have a deeply profound effect on us. We by nature have no business being Jesus' *servants*, much less his friends. But Jesus reached down for people even as hard to love as us and gave us the high honor of being God's friends who are even identified by his name, Christian.

There's a real sense of dignity and privilege in that. All the love is there like it is between a mother and a child, but there's a certain equality in friendship. So what does it mean that we are Jesus' friends? Well, friends want to see their friends succeed and will even gladly and freely help them where they can – because they love each other. Friends share common interests. Their goals are similar or the same. Their likes and dislikes are alike. They keep each other's secrets. There's mutual trust and confidence, and special closeness and openness and tenderness. That's the kind of relationship Jesus has forged between us now. He has made us his friends who are intimately familiar with his work and all his heart's desires, who are all in on his mission, and who want God's will and plans to succeed in our lives and in this world. *"I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."*

But how can we be friends with Jesus? I mean, there's not a whole lot of common ground between lowly sinners and the King of Heaven. Most friendships start with shared work or shared experiences; they start as superficial relationships, and then deepen over time as people get to know each other better and grow closer throughout the years. No friendship starts with one of the people dying. Except this one – and that's what makes our relationship so special. Jesus showed us that he is our best friend forever first of all by coming down from heaven and taking on flesh to share the experience of humanity with us, but then even more so, he showed us that he is our best friend forever by what he did for us: *"Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends."*

That Jesus is our best friend has no better proof than in what he did for us on the cross. Our friendship is based completely on Jesus' self-sacrificial love. As friends do, Jesus valued our lives and welfare even above his own and he was even willing to die for us in order to heal our broken relationship. Jesus died on the cross to save us who were rightly neither his friends, nor even good people. I mean, nobody would have blamed Jesus for looking at us and saying, with friends like you, who needs enemies? But instead Jesus looked at us and loved us and resolved even to sacrifice himself for us, because he knew that was the only thing that could truly *make* us his friends.

But Jesus didn't stop there. He went on then to add something really significant: *"You did not choose me, but I chose you."* Friendships are usually two way streets – both friends have a part in establishing the relationship, and either friend can end it – whether by choice or by

doing something foolish and hurtful. That's a real concern for people like us who too often answer Jesus' selfless love with loveless selfishness. But Jesus knows his friends, he knows our weaknesses, and he knows what he got himself into with us... so with unwavering, intentional love, he promises us: "*You did not choose me, but I chose you.*"

Our friendship is totally Jesus' work for a reason. If it weren't, we would have messed it up beyond repair long ago. But Jesus has known us, has loved us, and has befriended us from eternity, and he has every intention of keeping it that way until eternity. So for us sinners who struggle with doubt and worry about falling out of favor with Jesus and ruining our friendship by not doing God's Will, Jesus assures us: you did not choose me, but I chose you. We are friends not because I'm so impressed with you, but because I love you and I forgive you. And since that's all true, I will surely keep you close to me and keep you strong in the faith until I bring you home to be with me in heaven one day.

Again, that kind of love can't help but have a deeply profound effect on us. It's for that same reason we celebrate Mother's Day, right? Mothers don't raise their children and do so much for them just because they want a thank you – it's because they love them and want what's best for them. They want their children to grow up and be successful, solid men and women. They don't just do it for the thanks, but heartfelt thanks certainly should be a result of everything they do. Well, that's the same story with Jesus. He showed us that he is our best friend forever by laying down his life for us to save us and by choosing us to be his friends. He didn't have to do any of that, but he did all of it because that's how much he loves us. And everything he did for us to establish our friendship should produce real results in our lives.

The first result of our friendship with Jesus is a deep and lasting joy that affects everything we do. Jesus says, "*I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.*" It was Jesus' greatest joy to be the perfect Savior who was everything we needed, who could say, "It is finished" and really mean it. Jesus' salvation means that we are his friends who will spend forever with him in heaven. Well that's also *our* greatest joy. Our eternal salvation is certain because it depends totally on Jesus. Our joy is complete because we trust in our Savior who did everything we needed perfectly for us and so we know with absolute confidence that we have eternal life coming.

And now, we get to spend the rest of our lives showing Jesus just how much he means to us. That's a wonderful and beautiful truth that every Christian rejoices at. So what can Jesus' friends do to thank him for everything he's done for us? "*You are my friends if you do what I command... My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.*" As Jesus' friends

who have been shown his gracious, saving love, Jesus says the way we can thank him is by doing what he commands and reflecting the love he first showed us onto others.

That means first of all staying connected to Jesus and being fed and strengthened in our faith through his Word. After all, the only way we can know and do God's Will in a joyful and God-pleasing way is because of our ongoing friendship with Jesus, and that's the way we keep that relationship strong. Then secondly, doing what Jesus commands means being faithful to God's Word as we show the same selfless and generous love to others that Jesus has shown to us. Friends tend to rub off on each other, and Jesus wants what he did for us to rub off into our lives, too. So maybe you know someone who's sick or sad or lonely. Send them a card or visit them or make them dinner. Talk to them, listen to them, be a friend. Maybe you know someone who's struggling in their relationship with God. Reach out to them and encourage them to stay strong. Invite them to come to church and Bible study with you. Care for their spiritual needs every bit as much as their physical needs. Show the world that you are Jesus' friend (and that Jesus is their friend!) by being a loving friend to everyone around you.

So how will you say thanks? That's something to think about on a day like Mother's Day that's all about finally saying thanks for everything that went without it before. It's about looking back and appreciating everything our mothers have done for us; marveling at their love, their selflessness, and their friendship; and showing them ours in return. Not that this makes us even by any means, but at the very least that's worth a card or a call, some flowers or some chocolates, maybe a nice dinner, and a heartfelt "thank you" and "I love you."

So then how will you say thanks to your Best Friend? Well, we don't just take one specific day that we set aside in the Fall to thank Jesus, because *every* day we should show our love and appreciation back to our best friend forever. It doesn't matter how you do it, that's up to you; it's simply our joy to be able to show Jesus how much he means to us by the way we love in our lives, and it's our comfort and our motivation to know that the greatest benefit of our friendship is yet to come, when we'll meet Jesus face-to-face and be with him in heaven for eternity. So God grant us that, for Jesus' sake. Amen.