

St Columba's Church - Virtual Service - 4 October 2020

Welcome

Welcome friend. Welcome this autumnal day as we we worship Christ the Light.

Hymn: Christ be our light (<https://youtu.be/ZJq3bhdgQoc>)

Prayer (Prayers come from Church of Scotland: Weekly Worship)

Faithful God, we awaken ourselves to Your presence as we awaken too, to our discovery of who we have become. We know we were created in Your image, that You have a history of bringing us out of slavery and into freedom and we long to find that freedom today. We know You as the great restorer – able to transform all injustice into the kingdom of heaven on earth and we open ourselves to be part of Your future that is coming. Amen

Loving and amazing God, Your constant relationship of love and faithfulness is one which sustains us through all things. Your stories speak to us, transcending time and place, meeting us here today. We give You thanks for the choice to let go of who we have thought ourselves to be and become a runner in Your race, with the experience of the love of Christ as our only goal. We give thanks too, that You call us again and again to be Your people, that You love us and want us to live together in fullness of community and life, that You send people, prophets and Jesus, to show us Your love. In turn, send us as Your people and prophets, and as Christ to those who need to meet You.

And it is in this moment of honesty that we find ourselves And our part in the story – the things we stayed quiet about, the things we accepted as being okay, the times we served ourselves first so that there wasn't enough to go round. We ask for Your restoration, for You to make Your face shine upon us. That we can be Your people again.

And hear us as we pray the words taught by the One who laid down his life for us:

Our Father, who art in heaven,

hallowed be thy name;

thy kingdom come;

thy will be done;

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debtors,

as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation;

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom,

the power, and the glory

for ever and ever.

Amen.

Bible readings

Exodus 20: 1 - 20

And God spoke all these words:

2 "I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

3 "You shall have no other gods before[a] me.

4 "You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. **5** You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, **6** but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

7 "You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.

8 "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. **9** Six days you shall labor and do all your work, **10** but the seventh day is a sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your male or female servant, nor your animals, nor any foreigner residing in your towns. **11** For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

12 "Honour your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you.

13 "You shall not murder.

14 "You shall not commit adultery.

15 "You shall not steal.

16 "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour.

17 "You shall not covet your neighbour's house. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour."

18 When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance **19** and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die."

20 Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning."

John 15: 9 - 17

9 "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. **10** If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love. **11** I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. **12** My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. **13** Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. **14** You are my friends if you do what I command. **15** 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. **16** You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. **17** This is my command: Love each other.

Hymn: God is so good (<https://youtu.be/7IIZIPtQuW8>)

Reflection

The idea about speaking about friendship for two weeks came about after a conversation I had with Elaine Ellis - whom I admire in the way she goes about friendship. I was telling Elaine the tiny story of me taking five-year old Isaac, in his second week, to his new school. Isaac and I were walking home when another child ahead of us turned round and said "Isaac do you want to walk on the wall with me?" And I said to Elaine, you know it's ridiculous how happy this made me, And Elaine replied no, it's not ridiculous, we all feel the same.

There is something I think in how we feel in those moment, about friendship, that gives us a tiny understanding of how happy it makes God when he sees us with friends.

Last week, I used verses from the book of Proverbs, and the work of Tim Keller, to suggest some of the building blocks for having friends and making friends. First there is a common interest: "Do you like that thing as well?" Then here is, ideally, equal interest: you both equally value the friendship. Then there is constancy: As it says in Proverbs 17:7: 17: "A friend loves at all times, and a brother or sister is born for a time of adversity." There is carefulness. We are careful with the feelings of our friend. As it says in Proverbs 25:20: "Like one who takes away a garment on a cold day, or like vinegar poured on a wound, is one who sings songs to a heavy heart." Third there is candour. The willingness and courage to speak candidly with our friend. Proverbs 27:6 "Wounds from a friend can be trusted, but an enemy multiplies kisses." And finally there is Counsel. Friends value and trust the friendship enough to really share something of themselves. Proverbs 27:9 "Oil and perfume make the heart glad, and the sweetness of a friend comes from their earnest counsel."

I have had very nice feedback from last week's sermon and I can imagine for some there might be a feeling of longing for more friends or a feeling of failure in how we are as a friend. And this is where I want to introduce the good news of Jesus.

You see at the Last Supper, Jesus was was desperately trying to get across the meaning of the events that were about about to unfold. And amongst the words of Jesus he said: "My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. **13** Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. **14** You are my friends if you do what I command. **15** 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. **16** You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. **17** This is my command: Love each other.'

As Tim Keller points out, Jesus is saying that he is the ultimate friend. And we are made in his image. Jesus is saying that instead of inflicting wounds he is going to take them for us.

Jesus did not want us, whom he calls friends, to suffer so he suffered for us. This is a true friend. Jesus had the choice: go to hell or lose his friends and what did he choose? He chose, on that cross, to go to hell. For us. His friends. We have the ultimate friend.

And this liberates us. It means we don't need to be so afraid of rejection in our friendships with others. Why? It is because all our eggs are not in the human basket. No matter what other friends we have, we always have the ultimate friend.

Other friends can now become a bonus. And if there is hurt in our friendships. If there is failure or rejection. If our friendships feel unequal. We can remember that Jesus hurt far more in order to keep us his friends.

Remember also that no friendship is going to be perfect. No number of friends can totally take away the deep longing in our hearts. Therefore "Make Jesus the friend our heart desires." Make Jesus that friend and then feel liberated to make and keep friendships with those around us.

Here is another great way that Jesus helps us in our friendships. What was the very first building block, I said last week, there was in friendships? It is 'Common Interest.' Do you have that same interest as well? And what happens, Tim Keller says, the more we deepen our trust in Jesus? The more we find that we share the same common interest with those we might otherwise not find much in common with. There is tremendous potential in friendships with other Christians. These are friendships with Jesus at the very centre. Friendships between people whose deepest passion is the same.

When I began this little series on friendship I said that friendship is a type of love that is not essential - not like romantic or family love which is essential to us being born and being nurtured. However, there seems to be a particularly close relationship between the most extreme experience many of us will go through - grieving - and that none essential friendship love. It is at that most extreme experience that we seem to truly appreciate friendship.

My brother, Neil, who has been a minister far longer than me said that one of his great privileges is taking funerals. And I want to finish this two-week Ode to Friendship by sharing the ten lessons he says he has learned from people's funerals:

1. People remember holidays far more than careers;
2. People remember how your home made them welcome, not how much it was worth.
3. People love remembering when you were daft;
4. People remember relationships of long-term care;
5. The memory of how you dealt with struggle is treated as sacred.
6. If you listened, people don't forget.
7. People remember how you were different, not how you fitted in.
8. People remember what you created - meals, furniture, memories
9. People remember your passions - Daniel O'Donnell, bees, china cats.

10. Good news - people don't usually get too upset about your faults, they often miss them.

I think the biggest blights on memory, he says, are unspoken injustices and unresolved estrangements.

-If you've not been fair, try to find a way of saying sorry.

-If there's a fallout, the long journey to forgiveness is worth making.

-Resist temptation to sweep under carpets.

May your friendship with Jesus deepen. May this ultimate friendship liberate you in making friends with others and you be blessed in friendship with others who are also making Jesus their deepest interest. Amen.

Hymn: What a friend we have in Jesus (<https://youtu.be/cscMcqHquuY>)

Prayer for Others

Lord, We bring to You now our prayers for others and for ourselves. Lord we ask that You bless and guide Your church, here and throughout the world, helping us to reach out to others, sharing with them the good news of Christ and standing with those who are most in need of our help, love and support.

Guide us in our relationships with others, within our families, with friends, neighbours and those who we struggle to love or try to avoid. Fill our homes and communities with the warmth of Your love, may we learn to love and accept all. Pour out Your Spirit into the world, bless those struggling with poverty and homelessness, evil and war.

Help us to reach out to those who are in need. Bless those who are ill at home or in hospital, those who are feeling anxious or low, feeling like they would rather just give up than live on. May they know Your love and sense Your presence with them and may we as a church reach out to them in their time of need.

Bless the leaders of nations and people. Guide them in the decisions that they make, ensuring they work hard and fight for the people they represent.

Lord, may we always sense Your presence in our lives and in the lives of others. Transform us to be the people that You would have us be. All of this we ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Amen

Hymn: I will sing the wondrous story (<https://youtu.be/mv8wo-t6C1I>)

Blessing

May we be blessed with the restoration of Your kingdom

May we all have a part to play in that joyous task

May we see you in the work of restoration

and in our discovery of the Cornerstone that is Christ – yesterday, today and forever.

Amen