

Sonoraville Baptist Church
Sunday, October 31, 2010 – 11:00 AM
Rev. Steve Skates, Pastor

Series: Portraits of Jesus
Jesus: Our Best Friend - John 15:1-17

Introduction: A newspaper once gave a reward for the best definition of a friend. The winning definition was: "A Friend is someone who comes when everyone else goes." Here's an illustration of what that means:

Jackie Robinson, the first African American to play baseball in the major leagues found such a friend as that. During his first year, he faced hostile crowds everywhere he went. Even in his team's home stadium, it was no different. In fact, when he committed his first error at Ebbets Field, the fans got on him pretty heavily – even resorting to racial slurs.

But as Jackie Robinson stood at second base with his head down, he suddenly felt an arm around his shoulder. He looked up and there was the Dodger shortstop, Pee Wee Reese standing with him facing the crowd. Suddenly the fans grew quiet. Robinson later said that Reese's gesture of friendship saved his career. In fact, it became the gesture that touched a nation. Pee Wee Reese was a real friend because he there when everyone else had gone.

Friendship is a wonderful thing. It means so much to so many. There was a hit TV show about friends. Facebook exists because of friends. But more importantly, we can't survive without friends.

Did you know that most people become a part of a church because of a friendship? That's why most of you are here - because a friend invited you.

But can you imagine feeling the loneliness, the awkwardness, and the anxiety that Jackie Robinson felt that day –when he thought he didn't have a friend in the world? Then, can you imagine having a friend like Pee Wee Reese coming along and letting the world know that he was your friend? Can you imagine the relief, the peace, the warmth, and the comfort that would bring?

It's that kind of friendship, only multiplied a million times, which we read about in our text today. As we read these words of Jesus, you must know that a group of anxious disciples have just been told that their leader was about to die and they would be left alone. They had followed Jesus in the hope of a Kingdom, but now, their hopes were dashed. They needed a friend and Jesus was letting them know that He was their friend – their best friend.

1 "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.

2 He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.

3 You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.

4 Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me.

5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.

6 If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.

7 If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.

8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

9 "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.

10 If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed 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, that he lay down his life for his 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 to go and bear fruit--fruit that will

last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.

17 This is my command: Love each other. John 15:1-17 (NIV)

Obviously, these words of comfort and encouragement were very reassuring to these troubled disciples. There was no question that Jesus was their friend. The only question that remained was, would they be His friends?

You see, that's the question for us too. It's a settled fact that Jesus is our friend. But, the real issue is whether or not we will choose to be friends with Jesus! And if we do choose to be His friend, we need to know what it will look like. So, this morning, that is what we will be seek to discover. What is being a friend to Jesus all about? From our text, we see three things that will happen if we decide that we really want to call Jesus our friend. First, being a friend to Jesus is about:

1. Remaining With Jesus (4)

Jesus said in vs. 4, *"Remain in me, and I will remain in you."*

What Jesus is talking about here is having a real connection with Him because when you connect with someone, that's when we start to understand friendship! For Jesus, connecting with Him is remaining in Him! And connecting with Him is about sharing four things or having four things in common. First, it's about:

A. A Shared Relationship. The Greek word for remain is "*Meno*" meaning "*to stay in a given place, state, relationship, or expectancy.*" It also carries the idea of continuity and dwelling. So Jesus is saying, *"If you guys will stay with me, I promise you that I will stay with you!"* It is a shared relationship. But remaining with Jesus is also about:

B. A Shared Work. Have you and a friend ever done something together? Maybe a friend helped you rebuild an engine, or scrapbook together, or maybe a friend helped you complete something you started but couldn't complete. If they were a real friend, I'm sure the work went more smoothly and was done with a sense of enjoyment that wouldn't have been there without the friendship. This is what Jesus is talking about in verse 4. We get to work together, but we can't do it unless we stay connected to Him. But remaining with Jesus is also about:

C. A Shared Life. The ultimate reality of what Jesus is teaching is that if we don't stay connected with Him, we aren't going to make it through eternity!

Maybe you've lost a friend, and that loss made you feel helpless and alone. Maybe you too felt as though you were going to die! Well, vs. 6 tells us that without Jesus, we are like dead branches! Fit only for the fire!

So remaining in Jesus is important because of the relationship we share and workload we share, and more importantly, it's about the eternal life we share. Without Him, we have no life! But remaining in Him is also about:

D. A Shared Word. Jesus said in vs. 7: *"If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you."* What a promise! Can you see why remaining in Jesus is so important? Remaining with Jesus and keeping His word hidden in our hearts is a sign that we are His disciples and it is what brings God glory.

A young boy was sent to the store by his mother to buy a loaf of bread. He was gone a long time. When he finally returned, his mother asked, *"Where have you been? I've been worried sick about you."* "Well," he answered, *"there was a little boy with a broken bike who was crying. So I stopped to help him."* His mother said, *"I didn't know you knew about fixing bikes."* The boy said, *"I don't, I just stayed there and cried with him."*

Remaining in Jesus is like that. We may not understand everything, but we're still connected. We're staying with Him. We're friends to the end. But not only is our friendship with Jesus about Remaining with Him. It's also about:

2. Bearing Fruit. (8)

Jesus told His disciples in vs. 8, *"This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."*

Let me try to illustrate what I believe Jesus meant when He said for us to *"bear much fruit."*

My all time favorite movie is *Mr. Holland's Opus*. In that movie, Richard Dreyfuss plays the role of a frustrated composer named Glenn Holland who dreams of achieving fame as a classical musician. But in order to provide for his family, he takes what he believes to be a temporary job as a High School music teacher.

At first he maintains his determination to write an opus or a concerto by composing at his piano after putting

in a full day with his students. But, as family demands increase (including discovery that his infant son is deaf) and the pressures of his job multiply, Mr. Holland recognizes that his dream of leaving a lasting musical legacy is fading.

At the end of the movie, 35 years have passed and we find an older Mr. Holland fighting in vain to keep his job. The school board has decided to cut the music program. By this time, Mr. Holland loves his job and is passionate about defending the role of the arts in public education.

What began as a career detour for Glenn Holland, became a 35-year mission of pouring his heart into the lives of young people. But in the end, he feels like a failure – as though his life and his work has meant nothing.

The day school has let out for summer vacation, Mr. Holland returns to his classroom after he has taught his final class. His wife and grown son arrive to help him gather up his belongings. As they leave the room and walk down the hall, Mr. Holland hears some noise in the auditorium. Because school is supposed to be out, he opens the door to see what the commotion is. To his amazement he sees the auditorium filled to capacity with students and teaching colleagues and a banner that reads *"Goodbye, Mr. Holland."*

The audience greets him with a standing ovation while a band consisting of past and present members plays songs they learned under his teaching. His wife, who was in on the surprise, makes small talk until the master of ceremonies, the governor arrives. The governor is none other than one of the students Mr. Holland had helped to believe in herself during his first year of teaching. She speaks for the hundreds who fill the auditorium: *"Mr. Holland had a profound influence in my life (on a lot of lives, I know), and yet I get the feeling that he considers a great part of his life misspent. Rumor had it he was always working on this symphony of his, and this was going to make him famous and rich. But Mr. Holland isn't rich and he isn't famous, At least not outside our little town. So it might be easy for him to think himself a failure, but he'd be wrong. Because I think he's achieved a success far beyond riches and fame."* Looking at her former teacher, the governor tells Mr. Holland, *"Look around you. There is not a life in this room that you have not touched, and each one of us is a better person because of you. We are your symphony, Mr. Holland. We are the melodies and the notes of your opus. And we are the music of your life."*

I believe that scene depicts much of what Jesus means when He tells His disciples to bear much fruit. Having a friendship and a relationship with Jesus is all about using it to make a difference in the lives of others. It is about bearing fruit!

To everyone who remains with Jesus, and can call Him a true friend, you have translated that friendship into pointing people to Jesus. You've invested what you have gained from your relationship with Jesus into the lives of others, and they too have discovered what Jesus means to them. And today, even though you may not even be aware of it, there may be hundreds or even thousands of people who would say to you, *"Thank you for giving to the Lord."* Your life has made a difference.

But know this...it's impossible to bear fruit outside of being in the vine. Jesus said in vs. 16: *"You did not choose me, I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit - fruit that will last..."*

So being fruitful and making a positive difference in people's lives is God's plan for our lives! But if that isn't happening in your life, then watch out. You're in danger of being lopped off! Vs. 2a says, *"He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit..."*

But this cutting off branches is different from the general pruning that takes place in the life of believers. General pruning is for the branches that are producing fruit - so they may produce more fruit. Vs. 2b says, *"...while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful."* If we are not bearing as much fruit as we should, that is a good sign that we've gotten too comfortable in our relationship with Him. That is when God moves us and shakes us to get us out of our comfort zone. It's part of His divine pruning process.

What I'm trying to say is that producing fruit is a mark of true discipleship. Jesus said in vs. 8, that when you *"bear much fruit,"* you are *"showing yourselves to be my disciples."* And by contrast, if we aren't bearing fruit, we're either not His disciples or we've stopped serving Him like a disciple should.

Not only is friendship with Jesus about Remaining with Jesus and Bearing Fruit, but it's also about:

3. Sacrificial Love (13)

Jesus is the ultimate example of sacrificial love. Without love, real friendship cannot exist. The disciples had heard Jesus teach that He must die, but they had not yet understood it, experienced it, or even believed it.

But Jesus predicted His death here again in vs. 13, *"Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his*

life for his friends.” Jesus became the perfect example of this statement. He set the example of friendship by His sacrifice.

The term for love here is Agape. Agape love not a romantic love or a love between family members, it’s a sacrificial love. A real love that takes you to the cross!

What does this kind of love look like in our lives? First, it looks like:

A. Obedience (10). Jesus said, “*If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father’s commands and remain in his love.*” **John 15:10 (NIV).**

Jesus calls us to follow the example of obedience He set. Then in vs. 14 He puts it about as plain as it gets, “*You are my friends if you do what I command.*” But this sacrificial kind of love also looks like:

B. Sharing (12,17). Now this is the hard part. The greatest yet hardest command to keep is when Jesus said in vs. 12: “*Love each other as I have loved you.*” And just in case we miss it, He repeats it in vs. 17: “*This is my command: Love each other.*”

Real love is shared love. That means that real friendship with Jesus is obeying Him by making more friends!

Just as Jesus shared His great love for us by dying on the Cross, we too are to show our love for Jesus by dying to self and loving others!

Illustration: There were two friends in WWI who were inseparable. They had enlisted together, trained together, were shipped overseas together, and fought side-by-side. During an attack, one of the men was critically wounded. He was unable to crawl back to his foxhole. The entire area was under enemy crossfire, and it was suicidal to try to reach him. Yet his friend decided to do just that. The sergeant told him, “*It’s too late. You can’t do him any good, and you’ll only get yourself killed.*” But the man went anyway. He returned a few minutes later, carrying his friend. But he himself had been mortally wounded. The sergeant angrily blurted out, “*What a waste! He’s dead and you’re dying. It just wasn’t worth it.*” With his last breath, the dying man replied, “*Oh, yes it was, Sarge. When I got to him, the only thing he said was, ‘I knew you’d come for me my friend.’*”

Conclusion: Aren’t you glad Jesus thought enough of you to come to you when you were dying in your sins? He did it because He’s your best friend. But along with that friendship comes the responsibility we have to be His best friend and prove it by loving others. This poem describes the ultimate way you can be a real friend:

A Voice From Eternity

*You live next door to me for years. We shared our dreams, our joys, our tears.
A friend to me you were indeed, A friend who helped me when in need.
My faith in you was strong and sure. We had such trust as should endure.
No spats between us ever arose. Our friends were alike, also our foes.
What sadness, then, my friend, to find that after all, you weren’t so kind.
The day my life on earth did end I found you weren’t such a faithful friend.
For all those years we spent on earth, you never told me of a second birth.
You never spoke of my lost soul, or of the Christ who could have made me whole.
I plead today from hell’s cruel fire, and tell you now my last desire:
You cannot do a thing for me. No words today my bonds will free.
But do not err, my friend, again, do all you can for the souls of men.
Plead with them now quite earnestly, lest they be cast in hell with me.*

Would you be someone’s best friend and point them to Christ? There’s someone out there who needs that kind of friend.