Text: John 15:9-17
Title: Make Friends … Following Christ

INTRODUCTION

Jesus spent the last evening of his life with the most important people in His life. You'll recall that He gathered them together in a second-floor room. John's Gospel record tells us that as they entered the room and sat down to eat the Passover meal together, Jesus shocked them by getting up from the meal, wrapping a towel around His waist and, assuming the position of a servant, washing their dirty feet. Returning to His place at the table, Jesus then launches into some of the most memorable and intense instruction He had yet given to His disciples. He spoke to them of His betrayal and the one who would do it. He spoke words of comfort to them, knowing that they would grieve at His death. He taught them about the way to the Father and about the Holy Spirit.

> At this point some scholars believe that Jesus and His disciples may have left the house where they were meeting and begun to make their way to the east side of Jerusalem toward the Mount of Olives. On the way they may have passed through a vineyard, serving as a great teaching tool as Jesus spoke to the disciples that He was the vine and the disciples were the branches that would bear the fruit.
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> It must have been a tender, moving moment when Jesus fixed his gaze upon them and said this:

Read John 15:9-17.

For the next few weeks I want us to linger over these verses and explore the friendship that Jesus describes here in these verses.

> Back last Fall our staff began to pray about the focus for our church in 2007. As we talked and prayed we sensed that God was leading us to spend the year equipping our church to simply "Make Friends." You see it's very easy for a warm and loving church like ours to get turned inward. We have to be continuously challenged to build relationships with people, particularly with those who do not know Christ.
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> Dr. Oscar Thompson, one of my evangelism teachers in seminary, used to challenge the students with the reality that the Gospel moves primarily along the lines of relationships. Unfortunately, for many of us, the Gospel has reached a dead end as far as we are concerned. We have made no new friends in years. It's been years since we have brought someone to church service or event with us. Some of you may have never had the privilege of standing when a new believer is baptized, saying "I had a part in their coming to Christ."

So for the next year we're going to challenge each other around the two simple words "Make Friends."

And it all starts with being a friend of Jesus … which is essentially being a disciple of Jesus. I don't want us to make friends with others just because it's a way for us to increase our attendance and our membership.

> The civic club to which I belong is in a campaign to increase their membership. So they challenged us to write down the names of the people we know who might be interested in joining our club.
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> I want you to "Make Friends" with others because you have first made friends with Jesus. Our reaching out to others flows out of our friendship (discipleship) with Jesus.

Jesus comes to us and says, "Follow me!" That's the invitation to a personal relationship and friendship with Christ.

> Jesus said, "Follow me and I will make you fishers of men." This is an exciting invitation to make friends with Jesus … to follow Him as His disciple, and to make friends for Jesus through our witness.

But let's think about what it means to "Make Friends" with Jesus … to follow Him as His disciple. Following Christ involves …

1. A SELFLESS RELATIONSHIP (vv.9,12-13)

The word for "friend" in vv.13,14,15 is based on one of the words translated in the NT "love." The word is *philos*, and it means tender, brotherly love and endearment. But endearment and affection is rooted in something much deeper. And Jesus talks about it in …

John 15:9,12-13 (NIV) - "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. [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.

The word for "love" here is a different word that the word that is translated "friends." It is the word *agape* … love that is defined by the character of God … selfless action toward another person.

Our friendship with Jesus is based upon the selfless commitment that Jesus first demonstrated to us. And it's a powerful love.

ILLUSTRATION – Last October in the little Amish community of Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania, a local milkman named Charles Carl Roberts barricaded himself inside the West Nickel Mine Amish School. He was armed with three guns, knives, and over 600 rounds of ammunition. When police attempted to intervene less than half an hour later, Roberts opened fire on 11 girls, all less than 14-years-old, killing 5 of them. After these brutal acts, he turned his weapon on himself and committed suicide.

> As the news became available in the days that followed, a powerful story began to emerge … a story of courage, faith, and love. According to two of the survivors, when 13-year-old Marie

Fisher began to understand what Charles Carl Roberts intended to do, she made a request. "Shoot me first," she said, "and leave the other ones loose." As the oldest child in the group, she hoped that her death might somehow spare the other children or provide more time for their rescue. Immediately after this request, Marie's younger sister Barbie added one more. "Shoot me second," she said.

This kind of courage is seen in extraordinary human circumstances. But the highest demonstration of this selfless commitment is the way Jesus loved us when He died on the Cross for our sins.

And our friendship with Jesus is rooted in this love. In v.9 Jesus said, “Remain in my love.” Dwell in, live in, stay constantly connected to this love. This is a selfless relationship. It’s also …

2. A FAITHFUL RELATIONSHIP (vv.10,14)

What does this love look like? Well Jesus gets specific.

John 15:10,14 (NIV) - 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. [14] You are my friends if you do what I command.

So my obedience to the commands of Jesus is the way I maintain that connection with Him. So it’s vitally important that I hear and know the commands of the Lord Jesus so that I may obey them. And that is one of the keys of discipleship.

ILLUSTRATION - Martin Baker of Stockton, California, tells the story of something that happened with his uncle, Captain Ray Baker, who flew for the Strategic Air Command in the Vietnam War. The Air Force trained him, along with all the other pilots, to run out of their barracks to their planes at the sound of a buzzer. He couldn't begin to remember how many times he had dropped his utensils during dinner and bolted to his bomber.

Captain Baker then came home on a furlough to California. When he arrived, they took him to his favorite Mexican restaurant. Everything was going great until Captain Baker jumped up without warning and ran out of the building into the parking lot. Catching up with him his nephew asked him, "Where were you going?"

"I was looking for my plane," was his bewildered reply as he searched the horizon for the B-52. "But why did you run out here?" I asked. "I heard the buzzer," he said. “Heard the buzzer?” the nephew thought. Then realized that directly above their table was a buzzer the kitchen used to call the waiters to pick up their meals.

The captain had been so conditioned to leap to action when he heard the buzzer. That’s what obedience demands in our lives.

3. A JOYFUL RELATIONSHIP (v.11)

John 15:11 (NIV) - I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

Has it occurred to you that Jesus wants your relationship to be filled with incredible joy? And notice the promise: "So that my joy may be in you."

There's joy in following Jesus.

4. AN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP (v.15)

John 15:15 (NIV) - 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.

Some of you may be having a little trouble wrapping your mind around this truth. After all, it's one thing to have a relationship with a friend that you can see, hear and touch. How can you have this kind of friendship (relationship) with someone you have never seen with your own eyes, or heard with your own ears, or touched with your own hands? Can that kind of relationship be real?

> I tell you, on the authority of God's word, that it is possible to have as intimate and real relationship with Jesus as the disciples did 2000 years ago.

ILLUSTRATION – I think about my relationship with Nan. When I'm away on a trip Nan's memory and our commitment stay with me. She is not present, she's not visible, but I'm still sustained by that relationship with her.

> So it is possible to be sustained by a relationship with someone that isn't present. But for the believer there's more to it than that with Jesus. I know about Him, but He is living in me by His Spirit. Jesus is invisible but not absent. He said to His disciples, "I will not leave you as orphans."

But there's more. He speaks to me by His Word. His Word is as powerful and real as His presence.

> Jesus said, "Everything I have learned from my Father I have made known to you." What intimacy!

John 20:29 (NIV) - Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

This is a selfless relationship … a faithful relationship … a joyful relationship … an intimate relationship.

5. AN UNCONDITIONAL RELATIONSHIP (v.16a)

John 15:16a (NIV) - You did not choose me, but I chose you…

Listen, in the days of Jesus, He was not the only rabbi, the only teacher. There were many Jewish teachers and rabbis, all with students who followed them around. Typically, a person would approach a teacher and say, "I want to be a follower of yours."

But it is different with Jesus. Jesus walks across the room to us and says, "Follow me." He chose us. Imagine that. He chose us! What grace. It wasn't because of anything the disciples did, or what we do. He chooses us … He calls us to Himself by grace.

6. A FRUITFUL RELATIONSHIP (v.16b)

John 15:16 (NIV) - 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.

Jesus came looking for me. He walked across the room to where I was. We'll talk more about this later, but that becomes the model for what Jesus wants to do through us to others.

CONCLUSION

ILLUSTRATION - Victorious living and effective soul-winning service are not the product of our better selves and hard endeavours, but are simply the fruit of the Holy Spirit. We are not called upon to produce the fruit, but simply to bear it.

Roy Hession in The Calvary Road. Christianity Today, Vol. 33, no. 13.