

**“Friends”**  
**John 15:9-17**  
**May 6, 2018**  
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Who is your best friend? Think about that. Who's your best friend in the world? When something happens in your life, who do you want to make sure to tell? When things go wrong, who is it that you want to sit with you? When things go right, who is it that comes over and just enjoys being with you in your joy? Who is your best friend? Got that person in mind? Now I want you to think about how it is that you became friends. Did it just happen? Or did you choose that person, thinking to yourself, “That person is good best friend material, I'd better get to know them.”

This week on Tuesday, my friend Greg is dropping by for a visit. Greg lives in Iowa City and I don't get to see him very often, so I'm looking forward to his visit. In high school I got to be good friends with two guys, Dave and Greg. And the strange thing is that I don't remember choosing to be best friends with them. We were very different when we met in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. We had come from different junior high schools, so we had no history together. Greg and Dave were already good friends because they had gone to elementary school together, had been friends for years, and had even done their Eagle Scout project together. I barely knew what an Eagle Scout was. They were clean-cut all American boys, I was a long haired rebel who lived in the mountains. They went to church every Sunday. I had avoided church and God for all my teenage years. So how did we get to be friends? How did we get to be good enough friends that our friendship would last through the forty plus years that have passed since we met in high school? The thing is, I really don't remember. I just sort of remember that we started doing somethings together and we just hit it off. I don't remember choosing to be friends. It just sort of happened.

Lots of friendships begin like that, I think. Happenstance, chance, luck, you just sort of fall into them and you find yourself becoming friends. But I think for a friendship to last, to be best friends, more than that needs to happen. So it is that I find myself wondering at what makes some people friends and

leaves others as mere acquaintances. What is it, do you think? Common values? A shared sense of humor? Just plain history? Is it a similar world view? Is it just that you find yourself sharing a common time and place and it is merely convenient? Or is it some combination of any or all of these?

This is where I think choosing comes into the mix. If I'm honest about it, the people who become real friends are the ones who love me. For whatever reason they have, they want to be around me, they enjoy my company, we share interests, we like the same foods or jokes or baseball teams. We are friends because we get something out of it. It's easy to be friends with them.

But there's another kind of friend too. My friends Dave and Greg are still different from me. Greg is a doctor, Dave is an electrical engineer. Dave is Mr. Responsible, if he says it, you can take it to the bank. Greg has never been on time for anything in his life. He's supposed to be at our house at 5:00 on Tuesday. If he gets here by Wednesday, I'll be happy. He even waited until he was 52 to get married. Now he has two beautiful children who are still toddlers. Better him than me. But we are friends, not just because we have things we share, or that we enjoy each others company, we do all that. But we are friends because we have chosen to be through the years. Greg is my friend not just because he loves me but because I love him. Your friends are the ones you choose to love.

Does God have friends? Did you know that in the Hebrew Scriptures only one person is ever described as the friend of God? Now the book of Exodus does say that God spoke to Moses face to face as a person would to his or her friend. But it never quite comes out and calls him God's friend. But according to one of the prophets Abraham is described as "the friend of God." The friend of God. What an amazing thing, to be the friend of God. But isn't that what we are? In this passage today, Jesus says that he does not call us servants any more, but we are his friends.

What does it mean to be the friend of Jesus? Does he love us because we happen to follow him? Does he love us because we love him? Not at all. He doesn't love us for what he can get from us, for what we can do for him, but he loves us because he loves us. He chose us. He loved us first, the scripture says. Do we love him like that? Do we love him for what he can do for us? Do we want to be friends

with Jesus because he can save us from hell, or he can help us to become a better person? Or do we love him just because? Do we love him because he first loved us? Now it's true that Jesus loves us just as we are, as our best friend would. That's not saying that he doesn't want us to get better, to grow, to become mature, but he loves us no matter what. But maybe it is his love that transforms us when we love in return. As the psychologist Carl Jung has said, "The meeting of two personalities is like the contact of two chemical substances: if there is any reaction, both are transformed." We are transformed by being his friend. Aristotle again says that friends form each other in the moral life, taking on each other's characteristics—both good and bad.

As Frederick Buechner says, when Jesus calls us his friends:

"You are my friends," he says, "if you do what I command you." The command, of course, is "to love one another," as he puts it. To be his friends, that is to say, we have to be each other's friends, conceivably even lay down our lives for each other. You never know (John 15:12-15). It is a high price to pay, and Jesus does not pretend otherwise, but the implication is that it's worth every cent."

According to legend, when the apostle John grew old, the other disciples of Jesus had all died. It was only John who was left who had really known Jesus in the flesh. It was only John who had traveled with him, who had been with him to see his miracles, hear his teachings, who had sat with him at the Last Supper, who had stood with his mother at the foot of the cross, who had breakfast with him by the lakeshore after the resurrection. People would come from miles around to see John, to ask him about Jesus. One day, a disciple of John's got up the courage to ask him, "why is it that when anyone asks you about things that Jesus said, things that Jesus taught, the only thing you ever tell them is "Love one another." Surely Jesus must have taught more than that." "Because," John said, "if you only do that one thing, love one another, that will be enough."

Love one another. That's what friends do.