

“SERVANT’ VS. ‘FRIEND’ MODEL FOR LOVE”

Easter 6 B; Mother’s Day
May 10, 2015

Peace Lutheran Church
Grass Valley, CA

A TIME FOR FUN:

A Visiting Bishop spent some time with the children of the congregation. He asked an obvious question, “What you think a Bishop does?”

After a bit, a young one pipes up, “He moves diagonally.”

Pastors know it's a bad day when:

- * the youth pastor urgently asks you about the church's liability insurance.
- * your church treasurer sends you a post card from Geneva.
- * the redecoration committee gets "a good deal" on used carpet.

A CITATION:

“DO/DONE” from “Becoming a Contagious Christian”, Mittelberg, Strobel, Hybels, 1995, pp 64.

TEACHING POINTS:

1. Words that stand out: Servant and Friend
2. “Becoming a Contagious Christian”:
 - “Do”= Religion. “Trying to do enough good things to please God.
 - Problem: We don’t know when we’ve done enough. We can never do enough.
 - “DONE” = Christianity. “Jesus did what we can never do—lived a perfect life and died to pay for our wrongdoings.
 - Response: receive what Jesus did by asking for forgiveness and Jesus’ leading.
3. “Relationship of Response”
4. “Friend” is a model for life—for living love.

THE MESSAGE:

Whenever I get to this part of John’s Gospel, I’m always taken by the way that Jesus begins to distinguish between those who are servants and those who are friends. How, growing out of love, Jesus seems to make clear a distinction between the way we may want to think about our relationship and the way Jesus would like us to think about our relationship.

So, I want to break it down this way today. Servant is about obligation. The servant relationship is all about have to’s, the must do’s. There is no affection, no response and no real relationship. It is all about “do.” Do this and do that. Do this and the other. It is about a list of obligations that must be fulfilled. It is a powerless living, dependent upon the human inner strength.

When Jesus says that we are “friends”, that implies a living relationship. It implies a connection. The relationship elicits the responses and behaviors of love. Being friends is all about “done”. It is about nothing related to the past—it’s already done, it is already past. The relationship is based now on a present reality of a present love. The relationship looks to the future and exploring new ways of life together.

In the book, “Becoming a Contagious Christian”, Mark Mittelberg, Lee Strobel, and Bill Hybels have a section called “Do vs. Done”. It asks the question about the difference between religion and Christianity or between principles and relationship or between servant and friend. The difference is in the “Do vs. Done” concept.

Religion is spelled “D – O”. It consists of trying to do enough good things to somehow please god, earn God’s forgiveness and gain entrance into heaven or an eternal reward. This self-effort plan can take many forms, from trying to be a good, moral person, to becoming an active participant in an organized religion, even a Christian denomination, or by following all the right principles.

The problem is that we can never know when we’ve done enough. We can never know when we’ve reached the magic place. Even worse news is that we can never do enough. NO matter what, we can never do enough to bring us peace with God, or even with ourselves. The Bible is clear: “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23)

This is also the servant idea. Servants are always trying to do enough to earn the wage, the pride, the affection or the praise of the one served. It is about obligations to serve. One simply must do this.

And, you see, the one who views themselves as a “servant” always keeps a distance, always wants to be at arm’s length because one simply never knows when it is enough, when the end has reached, when the other has been pleased and the prize won.

In religion, we’d call it “the law.” Do this in order to get that. Do these wonderful things, usually good works, to attain the reward that God may have for you.

Christianity, however, is spelled “D-O-N-E”. In other words, that which we could never do for ourselves, Christ has already done for us. Jesus lived the perfect life we could never live. He died on the cross to pay for each or our wrongdoings. And now Jesus freely offers us His gifts of grace in forgiveness and leadership for our lives.

That sounds more like friend to me. That is something that grows out of a relationship, a friendship, with Jesus.

BUT, YOU SEE, IT ISN’T ENOUGH TO JUST KNOW THIS. There is some action required. We have to enter into the relationship. We receive the gifts of that God has done in Jesus Christ and respond in love to God’s grace. We recognize the forgiveness of our Lord and assume the leadership that our friend Jesus provides for life.

This is about what it means to be a friend. It is about accepting what has already been done and moving forward. It is about living in a relationship knowing that the relationship matters. It means knowing that the love and caring of the relationship matters.

Some years ago my then Nebraska Synod Bishop, David deFreese, suggested that ours is not a religion of regulations but a relationship of response. In different words, Bishop David was saying: servant is about obligation and regulation; friend is about being on the outside; and even servant is about the “do” of life.

Jesus has called us, however, friends. Jesus implies, in fact demands, that we are friends. As friends we live in relationship. We live in a relationship of response. Responding to the grace given us. Responding to the love shown us. Responding to the most wonderful gift of all—being a friend of Jesus.

If it has never occurred to you before, note that Christians were called "friends" before they were called Christians. That's right. The New Testament says, "it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called 'Christians'" -- long after the death of Jesus and the dispersion of his disciples in the early days of the church. But Jesus himself said to the disciples, "I have called you friends." Think about that. Let it sink in. "I have called you friends." Before anything else. "I have called you friends."

Author and speaker Brennan Manning came up with a slogan. The slogan is, "I am the one Jesus loves." It sounds a little arrogant doesn't it? But he is actually quoting Scripture. Jesus' closest friend on earth, the disciple named John, is identified in the Gospels, as "the one Jesus loved." Manning said, "If John were to be asked, 'What is your primary identity in life?' he would not reply, 'I am a disciple, an apostle, an evangelist, an author of one of the four Gospels,' but rather, 'I am the one Jesus loves.'"

In this regard, Brennan Manning tells the story of an Irish priest who, on a walking tour of a rural parish, sees an old peasant kneeling by the side of the road, praying. Impressed, the priest says to the man, "You must be very close to God." The peasant looks up from his prayers, thinks a moment, and then smiles, "Yes, he's very fond of me."

What would it mean, I ask myself, if I too in my faith journey came fully to the place where I saw my primary identity in life as "the one Jesus loves"? How differently would I view myself at the end of a day? Sociologists have a theory of the looking glass self: you become what the most important person in your life (wife, father, boss, etc.) thinks you are. How would my life change if I truly believed the Bible's astounding words about God's love for me, if I looked in the mirror and saw what God sees? Or if I clearly saw in the “looking glass self”, Jesus saying, “You are my friend.”

How would that change the ways we “live in love”, the model Jesus gives us, if we saw what God sees. Not a servant but a friend. Not an outsider, but an insider. Not one who does because one must “do” but who does because it has already been done? Not one who focus on rules and principles but on the relationship that demands the response of love?

Jesus calls us friends.

We are sent, now, then, to live as friends.

Amen.