

**Scripture and Message**  
**05 May 2024**

**Scripture: John 15:9-17 NRSV**

<sup>9</sup> “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. <sup>10</sup> If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. <sup>11</sup> I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

<sup>12</sup> “This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. <sup>14</sup> You are my friends if you do what I command you. <sup>15</sup> I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. <sup>16</sup> You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. <sup>17</sup> I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church.

**Thanks be to God.**

(This message is in more of an outline form than usual –  
what was actually said in the service is probably different)

**Message: We Are Servants No Longer**

When Jesus told the disciples that he no longer saw them as servants but as friends, this was huge. It was amazing! It was like when you were finally treated as an equal by adults you had always looked up to. Maybe professionally – a teacher you had in school now looks to you for life advice; maybe personally – a favorite aunt or uncle treats you like an adult instead of like a kid. Maybe it was that Thanksgiving when you were finally seated at the adult table instead of the children's table. I'm sure many here have had that same feeling of acceptance by those who at one time of another were 'above' them, but sometimes I think it is hard for us as 21<sup>st</sup> century US citizens to hear the class crossing words of Jesus and fully understand them in our body. We just do not come from a class-conscious culture, and most of us live with enormous privilege in the world and in our own country.

Privilege is difficult for those of us who have it to understand. Privilege doesn't mean we won't ever be treated badly, or that we won't have a difficult life or difficult times in our lives, privilege just makes it more likely that we will have easier lives. For example, how many of us have ever had to maneuver around a building looking for the one entrance without a step? Or once inside a building had to go to a different part of the building in order to find an elevator? That is the privilege of being able to climb stairs; or being physically as able as the majority of people living.

All of us have some kinds of privilege in some contexts. I have privilege that comes from being a citizen of the US. In most parts of the world, being a US citizen is a good thing. The US can be very protective of its citizens – especially when it is perceived that they are unlawfully imprisoned. I remember being very aware of my US Passport while I was in Nepal (both times) – I was convinced that the government would not imprison me for my Christian Missionary work because of it. (I may have been more convinced of that privilege than I

should have, but I was also privileged at that time by my youth – yes, being young but not a child gives privilege. Just look at how older people are treated).

The people of Nepal would have a better grasp of the enormity of Jesus's words to the disciples. They live within a caste system. The highest castes have privileges that the lower castes do not have. And no matter how much money a lower caste person accumulates, they will still never be invited into the poorest of an upper-class person's home – or treated as anything other than less than. It is hard for us to understand in our culture of rigorous equality.

I am also privileged by my education. Being well educated gives me more job opportunities. As a high school graduate, I could get a job in a fast-food restaurant, but they wanted a degree (or its equivalent) to manage the restaurant. There are many career paths you cannot follow without a formal education – and I was privileged to come from a middle-class family that emphasized education – even though my father did not have a college degree until I was in high school.

Of course, a generation or two ago, no matter how well educated I was, I would not have been able to be ordained. My mom – who is 85 felt a calling to the ministry when she was a teenager but had no ability to answer that calling. She was still in the culture where her choices were to be a nurse, a secretary, a teacher, or a wife and mother. My Uncle would be approaching 100 if he were still alive – he was born in 1925 the 13<sup>th</sup> child in a family of African Americans living in New Jersey. He fought in WWII and returned home to segregation and Jim Crow and lived to see that change. Lived through the blood that brought that change.

Now I have been privileged to see my church open its doors once again and show that when Jesus said we were friends – equals and not subordinates or servants – Jesus was talking about all the disciples and not saying that some are more equal than others and that everyone who God calls and show fruit can and should be ordained and welcomed as siblings in ministry.

Jesus was saying to the disciples on the eve of his death that he was conferring status upon them that they did not naturally have. He was moving them from one class into another. In England we might have said Jesus was ennobling the disciples.

And what does it mean to be friends – friends are those who always have your back – friends are those who know where all the bodies are buried because they helped to bury them – friends are those who will bail you out of jail at 2am – unless they are right beside you in jail. Friends are the people who we open our lives and hearts to – good friends are more precious than jewels – friends are those who have the privilege of being the families of our hearts – the people we choose – or who choose us – to be in close loving communion with us. This is the relationship Jesus has invited us into – friendship with all the connotations of that word - close communion – loving relationship – family of the heart. Friends. Amen.