

“fellowship and friendship”

June 2009

Hymn “Love divine, all loves excelling” VU 333

Scripture John 15: 9-16

Verse 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 I learned from my Father I have made known to you.*

Prayer Let us pray – God, we look to you as parent of us all. May your love, your careful providing, your compassionate concern for us, your firm expectations, make us glad offspring. Open to us your vision of parenthood and make us, as you are, willing to offer ourselves to our children, through Christ our Lord. Amen

Lesson One of the most touching of Jesus’ conversations with his disciples occurs late in his ministry when he says, “I no longer call you servants, but friends.” Deep friendships were valued in his world. Aristotle had already commented that “without friends no one would choose to live, even though he possessed all other goods.” Friendship grows out of common interests. Sydney Smith, the flamboyant English of the 1890’s was once at a dinner. When the woman next to him stated that she did not like gravy, he leapt to his feet and said to her, “Neither do I! Let us pledge a life-long friendship!” This is a facetious story, but one that illustrates that common convictions, shared interests, insights, tastes, and enjoyments determine friendship. At the heart of it is simply the enjoyment of being together, thinking, feeling, grieving, and laughing together.

The deeper the sharing, the deeper the friendship. Thomas Hughes wrote, “Blessed are they who have the gift of making friends. It involves many things, but above all the power of going out of oneself and appreciating what is noble and loving in another.” Or as Henry Ford succinctly put it, “My friend is the one who brings out the best in me.”

Being a friend means taking risks. To have a friend means to run the risk of being told things about ourselves we prefer not to hear. Proverbs has a wise saying, ‘the wounds of a friend can be trusted....’ On the other hand, there are few experiences as painful as being let down by a friend. Therefore, some would prefer not to risk it. A minister, Leslie Weatherhead noted in a sermon that a parishioner who prayed about a problem seemed to get no help until he discussed it with his friend. Weatherhead quoted him a line from Browning. “Hush, I pray you, what if this friend happens to be – God?” and adds, “He who speaks to me in the wind, cannot he speak more clearly in the vibrant tones of a friend?” Jesus would have said so.

In our friendships, God finds one of many ways to make contact with our lives. We believe that some of God’s nature is revealed through friendships; in them we see God as trustworthy, enjoyable, and committed to our good. No wonder a favourite hymn is, “What a friend we have in Jesus.”

Prayer-in-action Examine David and Jonathon's friendship in II Samuel 1. Pray about it and examine how you can broaden your fellowship group by making friends with more of the men in your church and your community.

Prayer Let us pray – Our God, day by day, in the deep places of our own hearts, we thank you for the gifts of life and livelihood, family and fortune. Week by week, we gather in our churches to thank you for the world in which we live and all that it contains. Month by month, in the fellowship of this group of AOTS men, we become aware of the subtle gifts of friendship, the listening ear, the shared experience, the tender yet strengthening touch, the affirmation of the group's interest and confidence, and the assurance of your presence as we meet. And so we thank you this month for the gift of friendship, the strength and confidence it brings to our lives, and the amazing assurance that you, too, are a friend. Amen.