

**May 9, 2021
Christ the Servant, Reston
Easter 6
John 15:9-17**

If you were to ask me, “Pastor Carl, is it more important to be friends with Jesus or servants of Jesus?” I would answer, “It is more important to be servants of Jesus.” You know me. You have heard me preach. Servanthood is a favorite theme of mine. We are Christ the *Servant* Lutheran Church, for heaven’s sake. I think that our task in life is to serve God and to serve one another.

Furthermore, I have never particularly liked seeing Jesus as our buddy. That strikes me as bringing Jesus down to size. Jesus is Lord and Savior of mankind – not some invisible little friend who is about our size and is the same color as we are. I have also never liked the concept, promoted in old time hymns, of ‘walking and talking alone in the garden with him’ because it promotes an individualistic “me-and-God” theology which leaves out the neighbor and the needy.

So, I find myself challenged by today’s gospel in which Jesus tells his disciples he does not want them to be his servants, but his friends! Sometimes I am guilty of avoiding texts I disagree with. But then comes a day of reckoning in which I dig into it, look at the message, look at my assumptions and come away with a new thought. This is the case with today’s Gospel from John in which he tells his disciples, “You are my friends ... 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.”

I always end up glad to have tackled the text. That is the case here where I have come away with some thoughts to share with you.

My first insight concerns the word *servant*. When we think of Christ the *Servant* Lutheran Church we think of outreach. We look forward to post-pandemic days when we can get back to serving food to Fellowship House residents in some way, shape, or form. I would like to see if we can't start up a mid-week meal again for the underserved in Hunters Woods. Our food pantry still operates, although not out of our building. So we know the word *servant*. But Jesus is using the word *servant* as it would have been used in his day – as household help ... and, most likely, *unpaid* help. Slaves, really.

Jesus told them: Servants have no part in the running of the household. They don't know what the master is doing. This is not my relationship with you. You and I have a common mission. You and I are in this together. Jesus said, I have shown you how to live together. I have told you how to live together. You are a part of this household of faith. There will come a time when I am no longer here and you will need to administer this house all by yourselves. You are not *servants* in my house. You are *friends*.

Then Jesus told them something which we should print out, frame it, and put it where we can see it each and every day. He said, "You did not choose me, but I chose you." You did not choose me, but I chose you. This is something which is as true for you and me as it was for his disciples.

There is this notion floating about that we need to "Decide for Christ." The phrase seems innocuous enough. "Decide for Christ." What on earth could be wrong with "Decide for Christ"? Well, here's what's wrong: It puts the whole relationship with God onto our shoulders and we have weak shoulders. It says that the thing around which everything revolves and depends is our own will power, piety, and decision making process.

The thing which righted the wrong – the thing which healed the disease – the thing which mended the broken – was *God’s decision for us*. Our human willpower is fallible. Our decision making capabilities are fickle. God had enough of that and said, I will decide for you! I will become one of you. And I will die for you. I choose you!

The cross is a decision. It is God’s decision for us. “You did not choose me. I chose you.”

Now I understand better what Jesus meant when he called his disciples friends ... and calls us friends. Dr. Peter Story was a great spiritual leader in South Africa who worked along with Archbishop Tutu and Nelson Mandela. Dr. Story once said that if we are to be friends with Christ then we need to be friends with the people Christ is friends with.

What if Jesus were on Facebook? (Just go with me on this!) Who would Jesus’ friends be? Would they be the same ones on our friends list? Would you see Hispanic names there? Native American names? Arabian? Afghan? Would homeless people be his friends? How about the names of people who are serving time in the prisons? Would they appear on Jesus’ friends list? Are any of these names on your list? Your name is on his list. Scroll down. Farther. See! It’s there! And don’t worry, Jesus will not unfriend you.

“If we are to be friends with Christ then we need to be friends with the people he is friends with.” That one has ramifications!

Jesus chose us. Who do we choose? And then what do we do? Friendship takes work. 34233. Do you know what that is? It was the telephone number for my very first friend, Danny. (That dates me, doesn’t it! A five-digit phone number.) Danny saw me building a tree house one day, went home, got his hammer, and we have been friends ever since.

Now, why do I still know his phone number? Because *I* called *him* all the time to see if he wanted to play.

If I wanted to keep up the friendship it fell to me to do it. It still works that way. When we go back to Ohio I call *him* for lunch (although he has a much longer number now.) I don't know about you, but I find that it works that way with friendships. You have to work at it and be intentional about it if you want it to work.

How much harder, then, to be friends with people we don't want to be friends with. Oscar Wilde once said, "Some people cause happiness wherever they go – others whenever they leave." Do you know people like that? Sure you do. We all have difficult people in our lives. Well, that person is a friend of Jesus and we need to be friends with people who are friends of Jesus.

Christ *demand*s that we love one another. He said, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." He did it for us. We do it for one another.