

## YOU HAVE A FRIEND IN JESUS.

Easter 6 – May 3/6, 2018

John 15:9-17. "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other.

Dear Christian Friends:

This report appeared in Wednesday's news: ***AMERICANS ARE LONELY.*** *Health insurer Cigna's 2018 U.S. Loneliness Index found that 46 percent of Americans report feeling lonely sometimes or always. 47 percent report feeling left out sometimes or always. A little less, 43 percent, report feeling isolated from others. The same number report feeling they lack companionship and their relationships lack meaning. The study ...[cited] research that suggests loneliness has the same impact on mortality as smoking 15 cigarettes per day. Gen Zers, ages 18-22, scored a loneliness rate of 48.3 out of 80, making them the loneliest generation. Millennials, ages 23-37, come in second with a loneliness score of 45.3. The Greatest Generation, ages 72 and older, are the least lonely, with a score of 38.6.*

Now, you might think, "Those young people use Facebook, Snap Chat, and WhatsApp too much. All that social media is ruining real friendships." Well, the study found that social media had almost no relation to loneliness.

So, what affects loneliness and what is the cure to loneliness? The study concludes, "*Respondents who say they spend the right amount of time with*

*their families, are well-rested, don't feel overworked and get enough physical activity have lower loneliness scores.”*

So, the cure to loneliness is not just having people you like who also like you. Yes, that is important. But to keep loneliness away you have to have meaningful interaction with your friends. You also need to get sufficient rest. You can't be overworked and you have to be physically active.

Doing all those things will keep loneliness away. And, as the report discovered, it is important to keep loneliness away because loneliness can hurt your health. Loneliness can shorten your life.

But what about the other kind of loneliness? That is, what about spiritual loneliness? What do you do if you feel separated from God? What can you do if you are disconnected from your heavenly Father? What is the cure to being out of contact with your Creator?

Those are serious questions. Those questions need the right answers because being separated from God does more than harm your health or shorten your life. Separation from God destroys your faith. Being spiritually cut off from God means eternal death in hell.

But you are not separated from God. You are connected to God through faith in Jesus Christ. In our Gospel Lesson Jesus shows us how he connects us to our heavenly Father. Jesus shows us how he cures spiritual loneliness. Jesus tells us how he saves us for eternal life in heaven. Our Gospel Lesson says: **YOU HAVE A FRIEND IN JESUS.**

Now, the word, “friend,” can have shades of meaning. For example, you can say to a stranger, “Hey, buddy, can you be a friend and lend me your phone. My battery died and I need to make a call.” Or, a young woman breaks up with her boyfriend. She says, “But we can still be friends, right?” But then there is that person you can always rely on. He or she is always honest with you, even when it hurts. This friend shares your values and interests. You can do anything with this friend and have fun. Or the two of you can do nothing at all and still enjoy each other's company. We call this type of person, “best friend.”

But Jesus is even better than a best friend. Jesus says, **As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.** God, the Father, loves his Son, Jesus Christ, totally, completely, perfectly, and eternally. And think about that. God is love. Jesus and his heavenly Father are the one true God, perfectly united in their being. So, only love, and harmony, and peace can exist between God the Father and God the Son. That's how Jesus loves you and me. **As the Father has love me, so have I loved you.** Jesus loves you totally, completely, perfectly, and eternally.

There is no denying Christ's perfect love for you because there is no denying that Jesus surrendered his life on the cross to pay the full penalty for all your sins. Jesus says, **Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.** Jesus is better than a best friend. He laid down his life to save you.

But Jesus is also better than a best friend because he did not wait for you to become so friendly towards him before he loved you. No, even when you were spiritually dead, Jesus became our friend. Even when you had no other interest except indulging your sinful nature, Jesus made friends with you. Jesus says, **You did not choose me, but I chose you.**

So, Jesus chose you to be God's children and his friend. But Jesus also chose you for a purpose. He says, **You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. This is my command: Love each other.**

Being a friend of Jesus means loving others as Jesus loves you and as God, the Father, loves Jesus. So, being a friend of Jesus means loving each other totally, completely, perfectly, and eternally. And that means always asking your heavenly Father in the name of Jesus, "How can I put other people ahead of myself? How can I spend my time, my energy, and even sacrifice my own comfort to bring joy and comfort to everyone around me?" And being a friend of Jesus also means always thinking, "When anyone asks me to forgive them for the harm they caused me, I will forgive them freely and joyfully. I

will forgive the way God forgives me—no strings attached, no hoops to jump through. I will simply forgive out of love because of the blood of Christ.”

That blood of Jesus Christ—that free mercy of God—that is the reason you can be a true friend to everyone around you. You know from your own personal experience how much God loves you. That gives you the power to imitate Jesus and his loving forgiveness. Jesus puts it this way in our Gospel Lesson. **I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.**

As a Christian, you are not some meaningless pawn in God’s universe. You are not some lowly peon cluelessly following orders from on high. No, by the Holy Spirit’s gift of faith, you are a friend of Jesus. Jesus has taught you about his love and God’s love for you. So, now, by faith, you share the same outlook as Jesus does. You share the same values as Jesus does. You share the same goals and ideals as Jesus does.

So, Jesus is your true friend. Jesus is even better than your best friend. Since he is your friend, Jesus is the ultimate cure for the spiritual loneliness that separates you from God. Recall that the cure to social loneliness is meaningful interaction with your friends and family, getting sufficient rest, not being over-worked, and getting physical exercise.

Well, you have meaningful interaction with Jesus every time you hear his Word, receive his sacrament, and pray in his name. You have complete spiritual rest in Jesus. He calms your troubled conscience with his full and free forgiveness of all your sins. Jesus never overworks you. All the power you need to live a life of love comes from him and from his power. And, while Jesus doesn’t make you go to the gym five days a week, Jesus does give you plenty of exercise. He calls you to use your time, talents, and your energy to love and serve your neighbor as yourself. So, you don’t have to suffer from any kind of spiritual loneliness. You will never be separated from God. Why? Well, **YOU HAVE A FRIEND IN JESUS.** AMEN.