

YOU HAVE A FRIEND IN JESUS.

Easter 6 – May 2 & 5, 2024

John 15:9–17. ⁹“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. ¹¹I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. ¹²My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. ¹³Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command. ¹⁵I 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. ¹⁶You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. ¹⁷This is my command: Love each other.

Dear Christian Friends:

A recent report stated: **AMERICANS ARE LONELY.** This report *found that 46% of Americans report feeling lonely sometimes or always. 47% report feeling left out sometimes or always. A little less, 43%, report feeling isolated from others. The same number report feeling they lack companionship. Their relationships also lack meaning. The study ...[cited] research that suggests loneliness has the same impact on mortality as smoking 15 cigarettes per day. Gen Z is the loneliest generation. Millennials are second loneliest. Boomers are the third loneliest. The Greatest Generation, those 80 and older, are the least lonely.*

Now, you might think, “Those young people spend too much time on TikTok, Instagram, Pinterest, and Reddit. 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 cures loneliness? The study concludes, *“spend the right amount of time with [your] families. Be well-rested. Don't feel overworked. Get*

enough physical activity.” Doing all that is important because loneliness is bad. Loneliness can hurt your health. Loneliness can shorten your life.

But what about the other kind of loneliness? What about spiritual loneliness? What if you feel separated from God? What is the cure to being out of contact with your heavenly Father?

Those questions need right answers because being separated from God does more than harm your health. It does more than shorten your life. Separation from God destroys your faith. Estrangement from God means eternal damnation.

But you are not separated from God. You are connected to God by 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,” has shades of meaning. For example, you can say to a stranger, “Excuse me. Could you be a friend and let me use your phone? My battery died. I need to make a call.” Or a young woman breaks up with her boyfriend. She says, “we can still be friends, right?” But then there is that person you 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 you always 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.”

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

There is no denying Christ's love for you. That's 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: to lay down one's life for one's friends.** Jesus is better than a best friend. He laid down his life to save you. His blood washes away your sins. His life gives you eternal life. There is no other friend who can do that for you.

But Jesus is also better than a best friend because he did not wait for you to be friendly to him before he loved you. No, even when you were spiritually dead, Jesus befriended you. Even when all you wanted was rebellion against God, Jesus made friends with you. Jesus says, **You did not choose me, but I chose you.**

So, Jesus chose you to be God's child and his friend. But Jesus also chose you for one more purpose. He says, **You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to... bear fruit—fruit that will last... And so, whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. 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.*** So, you are always asking, "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 means always thinking, "When any repentant sinner asks me to forgive him, I will forgive him freely and joyfully. I will forgive the way God forgives me. No strings attached. No hoops to jump through. I will forgive out of love because of the blood of Christ."

That blood of Christ is the reason you can be a true friend to everyone around you. The blood of Christ proves how much God loves you. And God's love 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 a peon mindlessly 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 for you. Jesus has taught you about your heavenly Father's love for you. So, now, by faith, you share the same outlook as Jesus has. You share the same values as Jesus has. You share the same goals as Jesus has.

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 good rest, not being over-worked, and getting physical exercise.

Well, you have all that with Jesus. You have meaningful interaction with Jesus every time you hear his Word, receive his sacrament, and pray in his name. You have total 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 his presence in your life. And, no, Jesus doesn't make you go to the gym five days a week. But Jesus does give you plenty of exercise. He calls you to put your faith to work. Jesus wants you to use your time, talents, and your energy to love and serve your neighbor.

So, you don't have to suffer from spiritual loneliness. You will not be separated from God. Why not? **YOU HAVE A FRIEND IN JESUS.** AMEN.