

Year B, Easter 6

May 6th, 2018

By Rev. Thomas L. Truby

John 15:9-17 and Acts 10:44-48

He Made Us His Friends

My father and I did not have the kind of relationship Jesus had with his father. Ours was tumultuous and troubled, broken by our sin and mutual refusal to follow the non-violent and reconciling Jesus. Each of us had come a long way when dad died in August of 2015. Prior to that, we worked hard at forgiving each other as we each, more and more, experienced ourselves forgiven.

What was the Father's love for Jesus and Jesus' love for the Father? I don't know. Maybe as we explore this passage from St. John's gospel we will get a clearer picture.

However it is that the Father loved Jesus, Jesus says he loves us in the same way. This is the love that Jesus says we are to "abide in." We can let this love wash over us and bask in it like the warming sun of spring.

This love can't be centered on forgiveness like the relationship between my father and me because Jesus and his Father were always in perfect harmony. They didn't hurt and disappoint each other the way my father and I sometimes did.

Maybe God loved Jesus because he just does. He can't help it. It's just his nature. He is a lover. Maybe Jesus loved his Father in the same way. Maybe the question of "why" they have this love for each other is the wrong question.

Maybe we think there has to be a reason because we don't know how to love as God loves. Whether we know it or not, we almost always have strings attached when we love. But the Father and the Son don't—not in their relationship with each other and not with us. In other words, they love us because they are lovers. It's who they are.

We have been hinting at this for weeks now when we say God is absolute compassion revealed in the non-violent forgiveness of Jesus. The gospels have

revealed it to us. Jesus has revealed it through the gospels. It's shining down on us and any blockage to it comes from us.

I was always a little bit afraid of my dad and I think he was a little bit afraid of his dad and maybe of me. These things are often cross generational. These fears and projections run deep in our souls blocking us from feeling the non-violent love of God the scriptures reveal. They say much about us and little about God.

In the story from the book of Acts the people were astonished that the Holy Spirit fell upon everyone who heard the word. It fell on a Roman military commander, stationed near Caesarea, and his whole gentile family. This astounded the circumcised believers who had accompanied Peter on his first-ever visit to a non-Jewish home. Peter brought their astonishment to the surface when he asked, "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" And then he ordered these outsiders to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Shocking! They didn't realize that God did these sorts of things because God is a lover!

Always before, Peter and his friends thought God loved them because of some special merit they had about themselves. Maybe they were Jewish rather than gentile, men rather than women, healthy rather than sick or religious rather than non-religious. It hadn't dawned on them that God loved them because God is a lover. That really is the essential message that Jesus came to show us. God is a lover. He just loves us like a normal mother loves her children only more so. The extent of the "more so" is seen in the crucifixion and resurrection. It is a very joyful message unless we have made an identity out of being exclusive.

If our specialness is built on someone else being "un-special" then we are astounded when the Holy Spirit falls upon those we thought would be excluded. It's like our rival getting a present we thought belonged only to us. At first we think "that's not fair, I am the special one." It is hard for us to think we both could be special and that might feel even better.

Jesus said, "I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete." Jesus' joy comes from knowing all are included, we all are special. It is the same joy he shares with his Father for it never occurred to the two of them to think which of them was the more special. Jesus' joy is a joy that comes from an open heartedness to all. Knowing that God loves us all and

can't help it completes our joy. We didn't know before that exclusion excludes joy.

We were not made to be in rivalry and cannot find peace until that issue begins to find resolution. The resolution comes as we gradually learn God loves us all and asks us to love each other.

Jesus said, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you." While it is a commandment, we can't do it out of a sense of "ought," obligation, or resentful compliance. We choose to do it in our freedom. It is driven by our desire to love him as he loves us. Because we "abide in his love" we now find ourselves loving each other because we can't help it either. We are being changed to where now we, more and more, are just lovers.

Jesus said, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." The crucifixion is where Jesus laid down his life for his friends and we are all his friends. He loved us by absorbing our violence rather than dishing it back to save himself. He wants us to do the same for our friends even when they think they are our enemies.

You would have thought Jesus would consider us enemies when we attacked him but his compassion is deeper than that. He understands that we don't know what we were doing.

But we know this now. We now know what he did and why he did it. The crucifixion and resurrection are not mysteries to us. We live on the other side of Easter. As he said, "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." Nothing has been hidden from us. Now we know Jesus laid down his life for us, his friends, even though at the time we thought he was our enemy. He did this to show us he has no enemies.

The initiative comes totally from God expressed in Jesus. He said, "You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last." We have been chosen. He made us his friends though we thought he was our enemy. He shared with us everything he heard from his Father. Now he asks us to keep his commandment which turns out to be to love one another as he loved us.

It is all based on responding to a love freely given, and on gratitude; inclusion, and being drawn toward his compelling non-violence. Forgiveness is a form of non-violence. Nothing is coming from a place of threat or compulsion. It's all voluntary. The disarmed God who makes himself vulnerable and powerless asks us to love each other in the way he has loved us. Can we grasp this? Does a flicker of excitement penetrate our pessimism?

He says that if we will love others as we are loved we will bear fruit and this fruit will last. It will last because it is built on love not rivalry. And if we are operating from a place of love and not rivalry, the Father will give us whatever we ask because anything we ask in his name has to be from a place of love. Thanks be to God. Amen.