

I HAVE CALLED YOU FRIENDS

John 15:9-17

A sermon preached by the Reverend Theodore S. Atkinson
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Confirmation Sunday, May 28, 2000.

"No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. 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." John 15:13-15

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

Jesus is talking to his disciples the night he was betrayed, the eve of his crucifixion. They've just completed a three year Confirmation class. They're faith is about to be confirmed by Christ's death and resurrection. Jesus says, "I'm not calling you *servants* any longer." Servants do what their masters say *because they have to*. Go to church! Go to Sunday School! But Jesus says, "You're not servants any longer, but friends." Jesus *is* our friend. "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." Jesus laid down his life for us sinners on the cross. He lays down his life for us every day – even when we deny and crucify him. He's a true friend. Jesus wants us to be his friends. Treat him like a friend. The best way to treat Jesus like a friend is by loving one another.

Jesus says, "You're my friends if you do what I command you." ¹ That's not a condition of *his* friendship for us. It's a condition of *our* friendship towards him. In other words Jesus says, "I'm always going to be your friend. But if you claim to be *my* friend and don't love one another, what kind of friend is that?" Some people claim to be our friends but they don't treat us that way. ^{They're not the ones you made a friend of} I overheard some girls talking at Park City mall. "Why do you hang around with those guys? They claim to be your friends but look how they treat you." Listen to this song written and sung by Bob Dylan. ^{They talk behind back they don't really mean that much} Somebody claims to be a friend but doesn't act like it.

You got a lotta nerve
To say you are my friend
When I was down
You just stood there grinning

You got a lotta nerve
To say you got a helping hand to lend
You just want to be on
The side that's winning

You say I let you down
You know it's not like that
If you're so hurt
Why then don't you show it

You say you lost your faith
But that's not where it's at
You had no faith to lose
And you know it

I know the reason
That you talk behind my back
I used to be among the crowd
You're in with

Do you take me for such a fool
To think I'd make contact
With the one who tries to hide
What he don't know to begin with

You see me on the street
You always act surprised
You say, "How are you?" "Good luck"
But you don't mean it

When you know as well as me
You'd rather see me *crucified**
Why don't you just come out once
And scream it

No, I do not feel that good
When I see the heartbreaks you embrace
If I was a master thief
Perhaps I'd rob them

And now I know you're dissatisfied
With your position and your place
Don't you understand
It's not my problem

I wish that for just one time
You could stand inside my shoes
And just for that one moment
I could be you

Yes, I wish that for just one time
You could stand inside my shoes
You'd know what a drag it is
To see you

*Dylan wrote: *paralyzed* (3.44 minutes)

Have you ever had a so-called friend like that? Have you ever been that kind of friend?

Some people claim to be friends but they don't treat us like friends. Jesus *always* treats us like a friend even when he gets angry with us. Even when we don't treat him like a friend. Jesus will always be a friend and he commands us, not as a master but as a friend, to love one another like he loves us. That's our goal. That's what we aim for. We'll never reach that goal 100% but we strive to love one another as Jesus loved us. That includes loving and befriending the unlovely.

That reminds me of a teacher I heard of. Miss Thompson. The first day of class. "I love you all the same. All of you are special. I have no favorites." Teachers don't always tell the truth. Teachers *do* have favorites. They have students they don't like. Teddy Stoddard was a student Miss Thompson didn't like. He came to school with dirty clothes that smelled. Hair all messed up. Eyes stared without expression. Nose running. Wiped it on his sleeve. Mouth drooped open like something was wrong with him. He answered her

questions with a disinterested, "Yeah" or "Neah." Miss Thompson got a perverse delight grading his papers. Putting Xs on all the wrong answers. She'd write a big F at the top of his paper with a flare. She should have known better. She had his records. Teachers have records of their students. First grade: *Teddy is a bright boy. Shows lots of promise but problems at home. Mother always sick.* Second grade: *Teddy is becoming withdrawn and struggles with his work. Has few friends. Mother terminally ill.* Third grade: *Teddy is too serious. Deeply troubled. No friends. Falling behind. His mother died this year. Father shows no interest.* Fourth grade: *Teddy is deeply troubled. Extremely withdrawn. No friends. Heading for real trouble. Will flunk unless something happens.* Miss Thompson had Teddy's records. She should have known. Then Christmas came. All the kids brought gifts for Miss Thompson. She was surprised Teddy brought her a gift. Wrapped in brown paper, closed with Scotch tape. She opened his gift. Out fell a rhinestone bracelet, half the rhinestones missing, and a bottle of cheap perfume, half empty. The kids giggled. Miss Thompson was wise enough to snap on the bracelet. She put a little perfume on her wrist and held it up for everybody to smell. At the end of the day when the other kids left Teddy stayed behind. He walked to Miss Thompson's desk. "Miss Thompson, you smell just like my mom. Her bracelet looks real good on you too. I'm glad you liked my presents." When Teddy left, Miss Thompson bowed her head and begged God to forgive her. She hadn't loved Teddy as Christ loved her. She realized Teddy needed more than anything else love and friendship. The next day Miss Thompson came to school a different teacher. She wasn't there just to dispense information. She was going to love her kids and be there friend as well as teacher. Especially the kids who were slow and withdrawn. She spent a lot of extra time with Teddy. By the end of the year Teddy had caught up with most of the kids and surpassed some of them. Years later Miss Thompson received a note: *Dear Miss Thompson. I'm graduating second in my class. I wanted you to be the first to know. You love and friendship has made the difference. Love, Teddy.* Four years later: *Dear Miss Thompson. They just told me I'm graduating first in my class. Wanted you to be the first to know. College wasn't always easy but I like it. Thank you for all your love and friendship. Love, Teddy.* Four years later: *Dear Miss Thompson. As of today I am Theodore S. Stoddard, M.D. Imagine that! And I'm getting married in July. July 27th to be exact. I want you to come and sit where my mom would have sat. You're the only family I have now. Daddy died last year. Your love and friendship means everything to me. Love, Teddy.* (From a tape of a message given by Tony Campolo)

Jesus is a friend who loves us no matter what. The way we show our love and friendship for him is by the way we love and befriend others, like Miss Thompson did. Because he loves us so much we're called to love one another.

Now listen to another song. When I hear it I think of Jesus singing it ^{Sing along!} to us.

When you're down and troubled
and you need a helping hand
and nothing, whoa nothing is going right.
Close your eyes and think of me
and soon I will be there
to brighten up even your darkest nights.

You just call out my name,
and you know wherever I am
I'll come running, oh yeah baby
to see you again.
Winter, spring, summer, or fall,
all you have to do is call
and I'll be there, yeah, yeah, yeah.
You've got a friend.

If the sky above you
should turn dark and full of clouds
and that old north wind should begin to blow
Keep your head together and call my name out loud
and soon I will be knocking upon your door.
You just call out my name and you know where ever I am
I'll come running to see you again.
Winter, spring, summer or fall
all you got to do is call
and I'll be there, yeah, yeah, yeah.

Hey, ain't it good to know that you've got a friend?
People can be so cold.
They'll hurt you and desert you.
Well they'll take your soul if you let them.
Oh yeah, but don't you let them.

You just call out my name and you know wherever I am
I'll come running to see you again.
Oh babe, don't you know that,
Winter spring summer or fall,
Hey now, all you've got to do is call.
Lord, I'll be there, yes I will.
You've got a friend.
You've got a friend.
Ain't it good to know you've got a friend.
Ain't it good to know you've got a friend.
You've got a friend.

(4. 23)

Let us pray: Dear Jesus, thank you for loving us so much. Thank you for being such a good friend. Help us to love others as you have loved us. Help us to be a friend especially to the friendless. In your name we pray. Amen.