

May 5, 2024 (Easter 6 B)

John 15:9-17

“My ἀγάπη Friend”

Having a best friend – is one of the best gifts you can have. They know you. They’ve seen you at your best, *and*, at your worst – and yet they stand by you. They love you. They defend you. They protect you. They help you. You can count on them – including those times when they need to be brutally honest with you. And you know: they won’t ever give up on you. They are true gifts from God.

And yet . . . I hesitate to call **Jesus** your “best friend” – because that title (while great) does not even begin to capture the **magnitude** of what Jesus is for us. He is SO FAR *beyond* the picture that pops into our heads when we think of a “best friend”. He *literally* went through HELL for you. He loves you with a perfect and everlasting love – the brand of love that exists between the Persons of the Trinity, so that He / GOD – made you, a mere mortal / a **sinner**, to be as close to Him (and as priceless and precious to Him) as His own Father! He lets you in on what God is thinking / on what God is doing – and says that you have a role in His plans and in their work. He perfectly serves you and meets your needs in a way that no human being ever could. Although BEYOND busy, He stops and gives you His 100% undivided attention whenever you need to talk to Him and He uses His Almighty power to do whatever is in your best interest, according to His Almighty knowledge and wisdom.

“Best Friend” simply doesn’t capture **all** of that. *What word would you use?* I couldn’t think of one – English doesn’t have a word for all of that. So . . . I decided to just use the Greek word HE chose: **Agapé**. Let’s learn and use that word and make it part of our vocabulary. This brand of love is defined beautifully for us in 1 Corinthians 13 (the entire chapter is a definition). He used it here **nine times** in this text we are considering for today. Jesus is our **Agapé Friend** / your **Agapé Friend** / my **Agapé Friend**. He loves us with a pure and Godly love that we can never fully understand or even begin to grasp.

Now listen to what your **Agapé Friend** has to say to YOU in these verses. Listen to His words *personally*, as if your Greatest Friend is speaking to you individually and directly . . . because He is: **John 15:9–17 (NIV)**

9 “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10 If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. 11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. 12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command. 15 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. 16 You 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. 17 This is my command: Love each other.”

REMAIN close to Him – your **Agapé Friend** – and everything else will work out just fine. *But HOW – I can’t see Him or touch Him?* He tells us exactly HOW – by being in His WORD. We just celebrated Easter (and in fact we still are celebrating it) – His glorious resurrection means death itself has been defeated and is no longer a problem. We see the change it made in the lives of the Apostles, and we’ve been changed by it as well. We connect to Him – when we come to church every week / go back to the waters of our baptisms / receive the Lord’s Supper / when you open your Bibles to read and study them – He’s right where He promised He’d be, and that’s how we **remain in His love**.

This thing we call **FAITH** is a miraculous, living, and active relationship with your **Agapé Friend**. And, I think we quite obviously KNOW where the **weak link** is in this relationship. *It’s on our side*. I gave you just a tiny glimpse of what He – your Agapé Friend – has done and is doing for you . . . but, my friends, what have we done to Him?

- We have brushed Him off. *“Sorry Lord – I don’t have time for you today. I would come and spend an hour with this Sunday, but I got a better offer. Sometimes other things are just more important to me than spending time with you.”*
- We have ignored His commands to worship / to grow in the Word / to serve / to give / to love / to forgive / to remain pure in everything – *“Nah, that’s too hard. I don’t have enough money*

to give; I don't have enough time to serve. I want to have some fun and enjoy a little filth instead. Everyone else is doing it. I'm just going to enjoy this sin for a while and pretend you're not even there."

- In fact, we have physically, mentally, and emotionally ABUSED Him by piling up mountains of sin – and dumping it there on His bleeding back. *"What's a few more sins going to matter to you Jesus – you can handle it!"*

Eesh. You can only push *earthly* friends so far – and they will give up on you. Best friends can (and sometimes do) walk right out of your lives – if, that is, being a friend with you . . . is just too difficult, complicated, or painful, you can expect that person will no longer even want a relationship with you.

But . . . **NOT** . . . your **Agapé Friend**. He stands there with nail-pierced hands outstretched – begging you to repent, to come back, and to find REST in His love. He wraps those nail-pierced hands around you and says, *"It's all paid for in full – you are totally forgiven."* He puts that nail-pierced hand on your back and says, *"Here, my friend, let's go this way instead, it's so much better, let me show you MY way, the way of love!"*

This is what **Agapé LOVE** means: to put the needs of others before your own / to always seek the ultimate good of the other – just as Jesus did for you. You can even love your enemies with that kind of love. Don't hate them back, but pray that they would repent, discover God's Agapé love – and be a part of His loving family too. It happened to Saul when he became **Paul**, and it's still happening to this very day.

Show that kind of love to the unbelievers all around you – what they truly need is an **Agapé Friend** – even though they don't know it. Agapé love doesn't leave people in the darkness and despair of their own sin and pretend it's OK – it calls them to leave the darkness, to repent, and to come into the Light. Orson Welles, who had fallen away from the Faith and slid into the darkness of atheism said, *"We're born alone, we live alone, we die alone. Only through our love and friendship can we create the illusion for the moment that we're not alone."* That horrible loneliness and futility is devastatingly REAL for those who have fallen away from Jesus. The best thing we can ever do for them is lead them back to Christ – our **Agapé Friend**.

And – Jesus URGES us here: show this Agapé love to your brothers and sisters in the Faith too. You are family. If you hurt each other, or have been hurt by each other – forgive, as the Lord has forgiven you. Yes . . . forgiveness is **costly** and **painful** – our Savior knows that better than any of us, but it is also healing, liberating, and powerful! And, it bonds us together in His pure love. Show this Agapé love to those at home. The ones closest to you can often push your buttons the hardest – but only Agapé love can keep your family and marriages strong and healthy.

This doesn't necessarily mean things are going to always go **smoothly or easily** down here. Look at the great friendship between **Paul** and **Barnabas**. Barnabas trusted Paul; despite his terrible past. He stuck his neck out there for him. They became the best of friends. But, after the first missionary journey – they had such a sharp dispute over **John Mark** that it tore them apart. (See Acts 15:36-41) Barnabas thought he was worthy of a second chance, even though he deserted them and went home early in their mission trip. Paul didn't think he was strong enough to handle the work. They both had valid points, and so they parted company – and two teams went out there spreading the Gospel instead of one. Both teams went out with Jesus, and He blessed them both. Despite the disagreement they remained One in Christ. You can see in Paul's later letters the fact that he still loved and cared deeply for both Barnabas and Mark when he passes his greetings along to them.

When family, friends, spouses, or partners in ministry are taken away from us – either home to heaven or off to a new chapter of serving God somewhere else . . . it hurts tremendously. But, we go on, with our **Agapé Friend**, who meets all our needs, and continues to bless every step of our journey toward Home. We know the grand reunion of all God's people is coming, so we always have that hope.

Listen to what Jesus, your Agapé Friend, says: REMAIN in HIS LOVE. Hang on to His Word. Do what He commands. Trust in Him, and your lives will produce the fruit our Lord wants to see. And, this will bring our Triune God **joy**, and bring us true and lasting **joy** as well. Having a best friend is great, but having an **Agapé Friend** up there in heaven who is (at the same time) constantly by your side – is *beyond priceless*.