



Pleasant Hill Presbyterian Church
Connecting faith with everyday life

Sermon Archives

April 2, 2017 – “Meeting Jesus as Friend” (John 11:1-46)
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What a friend we have in Jesus. Christians often use the language of Jesus as “friend.” This way of talking about Jesus has often bothered me. It always seems to me that when we talk about our friend or our buddy Jesus, we trivialize the relationship we have with the Triune God. It’s just not the same to call Andy my friend as it is to call Jesus my friend. I’m afraid that when we call Jesus “friend,” we forget that Jesus is also “savior,” “King of Kings,” “Son of God,” or “light of the world.” In our text today, we will hear Jesus refer to himself as the resurrection and the life. So what does it really mean to be friends with him? All of Jesus’ friends in his life on earth, were also his followers, his disciples. As we walk through the incredible story of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, let’s take a look at what being a friend with Jesus can really mean.

John 11:1-5

11 Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. ³ So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, ^[a] “Lord, he whom you love is ill.” ⁴ But when Jesus heard it, he said, “This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.” ⁵ Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, ⁶ after having heard that Lazarus ^[b] was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

Mary and Martha are friends of Jesus, when they share their joys and troubles with him. When Lazarus becomes ill, the sisters naturally send a messenger to let Jesus know. “Lord, the one who you love is ill.” John’s Gospel tells us, “Jesus loved Martha, her sister and Lazarus.” The dictionary says a friend is “one attached to another by affection or esteem.” In the original language of this story, the greek word used for friend and love are friend-*phileo*. Think “Philadelphia-the city of brotherly love.” This kind of love is companionable and relational, friendship love. We want our friends to know when we are in trouble, and come to our aid if needed and able. This isn’t unlike our own prayer chain here at Pleasant

Hill. In sharing prayers, we are attached to one another, companions and friends in love. Then we “take it to the Lord in prayer,” as our hymn underlined, or make a phone call, visit the hospital, or take a meal for someone. Jesus hears us and responds.

John 11:6-16

⁷ Then after this he said to the disciples, “Let us go to Judea again.” ⁸ The disciples said to him, “Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?” ⁹ Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. ¹⁰ But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.” ¹¹ After saying this, he told them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.” ¹² The disciples said to him, “Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.” ¹³ Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. ¹⁴ Then Jesus told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead. ¹⁵ For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.” ¹⁶ Thomas, who was called the Twin,^[c] said to his fellow disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

Thomas and the other 11 disciples are friends of Jesus, in their willingness to follow him anywhere. Just days before, Jesus and the 12 fled Judea, escaping a crowd who wanted to stone him for blasphemy, and a government who wanted to arrest him. Now after getting this message from his friend, Jesus is ready to go back. The disciples are obviously worried. They have walked with Jesus into many strange situations—Recently, they saw him heal blindness in a man, walk on water, feed over 5000 people with 5 loaves and 2 fish, and throughout all these miracles, spar with the Pharisees, debate with the Jews, and avoid arrest. Their friendship with Jesus is a constant source of confusion. Thomas, who gets a pretty bad reputation later for doubting Jesus’ resurrection, is first to get on board here. “Let us go too so that we may die with Jesus.” This is what friendship with Jesus looks like. Following him into certain death. Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “The only way to have a friend is to be one.” He also said “It is the blessing of old friends, that you can be stupid with them.” Thomas certainly abides by these rules of friendship. Jesus calls us to walk with him, even to the tomb.

John 11:17-27

¹⁷ When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus^[d] had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸ Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles^[e] away, ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. ²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him." ²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life.^[f] Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷ She said to him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah,^[g] the Son of God, the one coming into the world."

Martha is a friend of Jesus, when she's able to find hope in the power of God. As soon as Martha hears Jesus is coming, she doesn't wait for him to knock, she rushes out to meet him on the road. Perhaps as accusation or perhaps in faith she says, "if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died." Then she takes it a step further—"Whatever you ask God, God will give you." She has no doubt in Jesus' power, or Jesus' identity as God's son. She doesn't blink twice when Jesus says "I am the resurrection and the life, but responds with a declaration of faith. With Jesus as her friend, she has hope that the power of God is enough to reverse death. Maybe the death you face isn't the death of a friend, but the end of a relationship, the darkness of depression, the looming shadow of major conflict, or the closing of a chapter in your life. With Jesus as your friend, in all those different kinds of deaths, only Jesus brings comfort that lasts and hope that is real.

John 11:28-36

²⁸ When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." ²⁹ And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³² When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." ³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. ³⁴ He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵ Jesus began to weep. ³⁶ So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" ³⁷ But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?"

Mary is a friend of Jesus when she both expects Jesus to reverse illness, and when she shares in his tears. When Jesus asks Martha to send her sister Mary to speak with him too, everyone follows her. Mary flings herself to the ground and repeats Martha's greeting: "If you had been here..." But she doesn't follow it up with a declaration of faith, because she is in tears. He doesn't reply in comfort, maybe because he's on the verge himself.

As they walk to the tomb, coming closer and closer to the reality of Lazarus' death, Jesus begins to cry. Jesus wept. Being friends with Jesus gives us someone to receive our in disappointment, anger, and deep sadness, *and* someone to share it with. The other mourners present have mixed response to this, some empathizing with Jesus's loss. Some accusing him of inaction. What do you do with a crying savior? Jesus is fully God and fully human-tears and all.

John 11:37-46

³⁸ Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. ³⁹ Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead four days." ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upward and said, "Father, I thank you for having heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me." ⁴³ When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

⁴⁵ Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him. ⁴⁶ But some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what he had done.

The crowd of mourners gathered become friends of Jesus when they see life emerge from the clothing of death. You heard how this story ends. With Mary, Martha, and a crowd of mourners as his witnesses, Jesus calls his dead friend back to life. "Lazarus! Come out!" He emerges from the tomb, bound still by the wrappings of burial, but standing and alive. Many who saw, believed, and for them, this was the beginning of their friendship with Jesus. These people who witness Jesus' miracles and power, but don't get to be in the gang of 12, or write him when their brother is sick are the first believers who have to

figure out what it means to be Jesus' friend when you don't get to physically follow him around the countryside. Jesus is our friend, as much as we are his followers.

Steve and Sharol Hayner were friends of Jesus as they followed him through their journey towards Steve's death.

Steve Hayner, former president of Columbia Theological Seminary, found out he had pancreatic cancer in April of 2014. He and his wife, Sharol, began posting reflections on their journey on a CaringBridge website, which were later published as a book. The overwhelming response to their posts attested to the ways that they chose life in the face of death.

In October of 2014, Sharol wrote,

"What Steve and I both realize is that we have been preparing all our lives for this season. Our attempts to follow Jesus every day-every normal mundane day-have prepared us for these tumultuous days. This is what discipleship is all about. Knowing that one of God's goals is to transform us to look more and more like Jesus, we have cultivated disciplines of prayer and Bible study while building community, pursuing justice and serving others. But more important, day by day the Spirit has been at work in us, chiseling away like a master sculptor. Chipping away what does not belong...Giving us confidence that our lives are safe in God's hands no matter what."¹

The stories of their life together following Christ testify to how they've lived out their friendship with Jesus. They shared their joys and concerns in faithful prayer and relationship, they followed Jesus from place to place, inviting strangers into their home and nurturing countless young people and new pastors along the way. My husband and I personally experienced their hospitality, when we were invited into their home to join a marriage enrichment group in seminary. They declared their hope and faith in the power of Jesus, affirming that in life and death, they belong to God. They wept, alongside their friends and family, alongside their savior, in pain and grief, and loss. They always found joy in life, Steve's signature in any e-mail, paper, or other communication being, "joyfully yours, Steve." Even on the day of Steve's death, Sharol wrote "Steve's life was swallowed up by *Life* this afternoon...We are grieving, but not as those who have no hope. Truly, it was beautiful to walk him home together, and we trust that he is now experiencing the fullness of joy in Jesus' presence." Their lifetime of following Jesus, of building a deep friendship with our savior, allowed the Hayners to find the joy of life in the midst of death.

¹ Steve and Sharol Hayner, *Joy in the Journey*, pg. 93.

Being real friends with Jesus is not outside our grasp. Try what Mary and Martha did, in sharing your troubles with Jesus and his followers or your friends in this place. Listen for how God might be calling you to be like Thomas, following Jesus somewhere you weren't planning on going. Find moments when you can have the hope of Martha and the vulnerability of Mary. Look for places where life is springing forth, maybe even within a part of yourself you thought long dead. In front of us is the Lord's table, where we can come and eat with our friend, Jesus. At this table, we remember the brokenness and death in our lives, but also enjoy the taste of fresh bread, the bread of life, nourishing us for a lifetime of friendship. The next time we hear about Lazarus in John's Gospel, he's sitting and eating at a table with Jesus, Mary, Martha, and the disciples, a picture of the hope we have to look forward to in friendship with our risen Lord. This is a friend worth following. What a friend we have in Jesus, the resurrection and the life.