



ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PINES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

SERMON Veterans Day 2012

Friends

Mostly we all want to have them. From early childhood onward we ask in various ways, “Will you be my friend?” Middle school and sometimes high school girls exchange necklaces or bracelets with half a heart with their best friend and bff is used to share a sentiment or hope that best friends forever will bind you together with someone else. Not sure what boys or young men do to seal friendships, although one of our sons poked his finger with a knife and became a blood brother with his important 10 year old friend at that time. For we do have rituals or elaborate ways to set some sort of mark on who is a friend. And even Facebook has set us up to ask lots of other people, “will you friend me?” I think we all want to be able identify that we have friends.

For it is in having our friends, and our family, and our neighbors that that helps us feel safe and secure. We know where we belong and who cares for us and those identities help create our world, help us feel loved and accepted.

Now today we have three readings from the gospels that tell us about our neighbor, our family, and our friends. And the definitions that Jesus gives us might cause us to squirm a bit or shake our heads and refocus in order to understand how Jesus defines friend, neighbor and family.

I know if you ask a child who their neighbor is they will name people who live in houses right around them. And family is the people who live in the house with you or are called grandma, grandpa, aunt, cousin, uncle. And friends – well we’ve already heard a little about how we identify our friends. So when Jesus says that a neighbor is one who shows mercy – even unto a stranger, and family are the least among us-strangers to whom you show care and welcome and food and clothing, and friends are those who do what Jesus commands- loving others with a love that is willing to die for others – well that really broadens our world, really changes our definitions, really stretches our boundaries.

And if I pause a moment to think about who can accept these huge definitions of friend, family, and neighbor – I realize, I recognize that the soldier can. For a soldier is trained, molded, and formed to see a broader world than the one in which they grew up. They leave their childhood homes and travel into strange, new communities that become family units and they travel to

different parts of the world and see more and more neighbors of all different habits and beliefs and they create and survive with bonds that form friends at a depth few, if any of us will ever understand.

The soldier knows about showing mercy, about caring for others with food and clothing and visits, and they are willing to lay down their life for their friends – which praise God – includes you and me. They learn; they are changed as human beings until a retired Marine can share a quote like this on his Facebook page.

“I now know why men who have been to war yearn to reunite. Not to tell stories or look at old pictures. Not to laugh or weep. Comrades gather because they long to be with men who once acted at their best; men who suffered and sacrificed, who were stripped of their humanity. I did not pick these men. They were delivered by fate and the military. But I know them in a way I know no other men. I have never given anyone such trust. They were willing to guard something more precious than my life. They would have carried my reputation, the memory of me. It was part of the bargain we all made, the reason we were so willing to die for one another. As long as I have my memory, I will think of them all, every day. I am sure that when I leave this world, my last thought will be of my family and comrades....such good men.”

A deep pool of caring – trust, sacrifice, honor, suffering, acting at ones best, bearing fruit. A soldier begins to grasp the kind of love Jesus speaks about. A love that spreads itself out even unto the stranger, a love that lasts, a love that one will sacrifice their life for, a love that turns to God for the source of all strength and direction.

A soldier knows the ripples that spread into the world when they pledge their lives to God, to honor, to comrades, to country, to living deeply and to steadfastness. These ripples provide strength, stability, and hope for the world we live in. These ripples connect us all as family, neighbors, and friends. And for that I say – Thank you. Thank you for your caring. Thank you for your service. Thank you for your broad vision of the world that includes people that are strangers, people who are different than you and I, people you are willing to care for and care about. Thank you for your sacrifices. Thank you for your presence with us today.

We will soon come to the time in our worship service where we will all join in saying Thank You. In fact, another word for our communion is the Great Thanksgiving. Together, as a community, we will gather around Christ’s table and we will give thanks. We give thanks that God loves all of us, we give thanks that Jesus was willing to lay down his life for each and every one of us, we give thanks that we are here today and we are fed and safe and sheltered. And today especially – let us give thanks for veterans – for humans who are willing to love deeply, willing to sacrifice their lives, willing to serve others, willing to broaden their hearts and minds and lives to see family, friends, and neighbors all over this world, ever learning more and more about a love that is the love that Jesus asks us all to share.

Thanks be to veterans. Thanks be to God.