

WHAT ARE FRIENDS FOR?**John 15:12-17**

Intro: Twenty-six years ago this past week, construction began on our home in Bainbridge, PA. Three months later we moved into that that house.

This morning I'm beginning another construction project that will take about 2 months. It is the construction project that is our relationship with others in the Kingdom of God. As Christ Followers we must be building one another up. As a matter of fact, our mission at ABC is "*To be a worshipping and nurturing community of faith, relying on the Holy Spirit, the Bible and each other to reach the world for Christ.*" Notice that there are several ideas in that mission that refer to our relationship with one another. The fact that we are to be nurturing one another is one big clue. The Oxford online dictionary defines nurture as a verb that means, "*care for and encourage the growth or development of.*" and a noun that is similar: "*the process of caring for and encouraging the growth or development of someone or something.*" As we look to the Spirit of God and his word, and rely on each other, we build one another up to build the Kingdom.

This idea came from a conversation in Board meeting back in March where one of us pointed out the fact that we at ABC need to examine everything we do as a Church and discard anything that does not build one another up and voila! There was my next sermon series. Not because I was desperately needed one (which I did), but because the church of Jesus Christ desperately needs a refresher in edification (which is a fancy word for building up). So, that is why we will be in the midst of a building one another up project for the next couple months.

We need to begin with a foundational truth and we get that directly from Jesus. Listen to our text from John 15...

(Read John 15:12-17)

The foundational truth is that it all starts with love. Jesus told Nicodemus that . . . *God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.* John 3:16. At this same meal where Jesus is teaching about love, it began with him washing his disciples' feet, a supreme act of servitude. The account begins with this description, *having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.* John 13:1b. And now the teaching has reached a crescendo in our text . . .

Love is a commandment

- It's not debatable. Jesus loved us to death (his death) and it's what he expects of us too and so this portion of his teaching begins in verse 12 and ends with verse 17 with love as a command.
- But he didn't just haphazardly throw it in here in this passage – he's been talking about love in the verses leading up to it as he talks about how he is the vine and we are the branches. Any branch that does not bear fruit will be lopped off. So, we need to stay with him and love one another. Listen, *As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.* John 15:9-11. He's been loved by the Father and he is passing that love on and as we do, our joy will be full. As we follow his commandment, and we must, our joy will be full.
- But it's not just a light commitment. He's going to prove it in the next 24 hours that...

Love lays down its life

- Love is sacrificial. *Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.* 1 Corinthians 13:7. Love gives all.
- Remember a few years back when a dad and his son were sitting at a Pittsburgh Pirates Spring Training game and Dad saved his son from being bashed in the face by a bat that had slipped from the hands of Pirate player, Danny Ortiz. Notice in the picture that everyone else is diving for cover and the boy is wrapped up – not in the game, but in his cell phone. But dad took the hit. He sacrificed his arm for his son's face, and maybe even his life. That dad, like 99.9999% of all dads and moms and granddads and grandmoms would have given his very life save that boy. That is the way love is. That is what love does. It will give up its life.
- It's what Jesus did. Jesus has loved us with the greatest love which is to die for us. So, he gave everything, even life itself, for others. There is no greater proof of love. And it's what Jesus expects of us. Love demands that we would even lay down our life for our friend...

Friendship with Jesus changes everything

- You see, a friend keeps nothing back from his friends – even his life. Commentator, Floyd Filson writes, "*He is laying down his life for his friends, and these disciples are his friends if—an important if—they do what he commands them by loving one another and by living in steady loyalty to him.*"
- But notice what that friendship requires. *You are my friends if you do what I command you.* John 15:14. We are his disciples, but we are also his friends and friendship involves obedience. If we don't love our brothers and sisters, then we are living in disobedience to Jesus and are no longer his friends. We are no longer servants either – we are friends. Friends let you in on what's going on in their life. They share the deep issues you struggle with and celebrate the victories too. F. F. Bruce writes "*We should not infer from no longer that Jesus had formally called his disciples slaves, or treated them as such. The point is rather than now, in the upper room, he is admitting them to the inner motives of his ministry and impending service. It is not for the slave to know why his master says do this; it is for the slave to do it: he's not to reason why. But with a friend one shares one's hope and plans.*" (Tell about Gene walking into our house in PA and bellowing, "Okay, what's going on here!") We could finally share what we had been keeping to ourselves. It was so freeing. Love in the body of Christ is so freeing. Friendship is so freeing.
- Friendship changes everything. *No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.* John 15:15. F. B. Meyer writes, "There is no limit to what the father will do for those whom his Son calls "friends"". And there isn't. We can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (Philippians 4:13) because he has called us friends. And that's because...

Jesus chose us

- Yes. He made room for us. Paul writes, *For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* Romans 5:6-8. That's what friends do and that's what he does for his chosen. Sinners saved by grace.
- He chose us to go and love one another and bear fruit for the Kingdom.
- And finally...

Love is the foundation of the Body of Christ

- We all know about the horrific earthquakes that rocked Turkey and Syria back in February. Tens of thousands were killed and the suffering still goes on there. One contributing factor to the extensive death toll and damage was attributed to shoddy construction that caused buildings to collapse like pancakes into themselves and killing everyone inside. Without love the church would collapse into itself in the same way with similar fatality.
- To be in Christ means to live in the fellowship of his disciples in his church. So, we must love one another, with selfless love and loyalty like that which Jesus has shown toward us. He gave everything – so we give everything. As we love one another, the church is built on it. The wonderful hymn *Speak O Lord* prays,

*That the light of Christ might be seen today
 In our acts of love and our deeds of faith
 Speak, O Lord, and fulfill in us
 All Your purposes for Your glory
 And it ends with
 Speak, O Lord, till Your church is built
 And the earth is filled with Your glory*

Till YOUR church is built. We build the church for his glory and with the foundation of love.

- Love is the central characteristic of the church. Commentator Leon Morris quotes Augustine who said "*Love and do what thou wilt.*" and goes on to say that it is a clear expression of what Jesus is teaching here. "*If we love in the sense in which Jesus uses the term, we need no other rule.*" That is to say, as we love one another with the love of Christ, the church will be built and the kingdom will grow.

Conclusion: But do we? Do we love one another?

Now I know we do love one another here at ABC. But how are we at loving others in the Church universal. We've been talking about this in the *Until Unity* study from Francis Chan that we've been using in LifeGroups. Just this

last week, using this very passage from John 15, Chan challenged us to love others. Our job is to love others and it is God's job to convict and to judge.

The biggest complaint not-believers have against the Church (and it's also their biggest excuse for staying away) is the division they see in the Church. It's true. There is lots of division and infighting and tearing one another down. But here is a solution to it – DON'T GET SUCKED INTO THE HATE AND DIVISION! Paul put it this way, *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary:*

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;

if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Romans 12:14-20.

It's up to us. And we can be a city on a hill ABC. Let's befriend others make sure that the love we have for one another gets spread around to all the world. That's what friends are for – and it will strengthen the foundation of the church as we build one another up. Amen.