

December 7, 2015

Proverbs 17:17; Matthew 9:9-13

Giving the Gift of Christmas: “The Gift of Friendship”

In this series of sermons during the advent season we are looking at four gifts we can give as followers of Jesus that are priceless, yet cost us nothing in terms of money. The four gifts we are looking at are like oxygen, without them we cannot live. If we do not experience these four gifts we will die, and if we do not give them we kill those around us.

The first gift we looked at last week was the gift of love. The basis for giving this gift of love is God sending of his Son Jesus in love so that we might have our sins forgiven and our lives renewed in him. Because “the Father lavished his great love upon us in His Son” (I John 3:1) so ought we to give God’s love in Jesus to those whom He puts in our lives. This first gift is foundational to the other three. Without this first gift of love the others cannot exist.

Today we are going to look at our second gift, the gift of friendship. We might also call this the gift of giving our time in another person’s life. Without the investment of time there can be no friendship. Time must be spent in order for the friendship to grow.

One of the things that is easy to observe during the Christmas season is the guilt that we Americans sometimes have when it comes to time and friendships. Christmas can easily become a subconscious way for some of us to make up for shortcomings in the work of being a friend. Many people try to give gifts as a way of compensating for their busyness. “I know I haven’t been able to be there for you but I am going to give this material gift to you so that you will know that I love you.” Again, I am all for giving gifts but what we need and what others need from us more than the material gifts is our friendship and time.

Why is this? Why do people need this so bad? Because people are created in the image of God.

God is not Unitarian but Trinitarian. God is a God of relationships. Within the Godhead there is an eternal relationship of love, devotion, unity, and submission that is mutually shared between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Within the Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not buying material gifts for one another in order to ease their guilt for not being a friend. No, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are spending time together in relationship to one another in mutual love, devotion, and friendship. Because God is this way and we have been created by God in His image, so too are we made with the same relational DNA.

That is why we need friendships so bad- God made us that way. And just as the basis for our loving one another is rooted in God’s prior love He gave us in His Son Jesus, so too is our basis for befriending one another rooted in God’s prior relational nature as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We love because first God loved us and we relate in friendship to one another because God Himself is a God of relationships.

One of the most remarkable things about the life of Jesus is the amount of time he spent with other people in friendship.

When Jesus began his ministry he called unto himself 12 disciples to follow him wherever he went. Jesus invested his life in these men. He taught them, prayed with them, ate with them, walked with

them, worshipped with them, fished with them, laughed with them, and wept with them. He was always saying to them “follow me” (Jn. 1:43) or “come along with me and see.” (Jn. 1:39)

There were times we read about in the gospels where Jesus (like all human beings) needed to get away from it all. In those times he would get alone by himself in order to pray and be with his Heavenly Father but part of the reason he was getting his batteries recharged in his alone time with the Father so that he could continue to invite his disciples to be in his life.

Why did spend so much time with these 12 men? Certainly it was because Jesus was in the process of changing the world with the gospel but he did it first and foremost because he loved these 12 disciples and that is what you do when you love somebody, you spend time with them.

Not only did Jesus build friendships with the inner twelve but the Bible also speaks of many other disciples he spent time with. A good example of this would be Mary and Martha and their brother Lazarus. Jesus also had a reputation for befriending sinners- the outcasts, the forgotten, and undesirables of society.

In the lighting of the advent candles the children stated that the accusation *is* true, “Jesus Christ *is* the friend of sinners.” That comes from Matthew chapter 11:18-19 where Jesus said, **“For John came neither eating nor drinking and his detractors said, “he has a demon.” But the Son of man came eating and drinking (meaning Jesus) and they say, “Here is a glutton and drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.”** The accusation *is* true but not entirely. Jesus was no drunkard or glutton but he was definitely a friend of sinners!

Two of the most beautiful examples of this come from the gospel of John.

In John 4 Jesus encounters a woman from Samaria at the well. In the eyes of most Jewish people she had two things going against her. First, she was from Samaria and Jews and Samaritans did not like each other. Second, her reputation was not so hot. She had previously had five husbands and she was now with a man whom she was not married to. But Jesus reached out in love to her and offered “living water” that leads to eternal life.

The second example is also a woman. It is the woman who was caught in adultery in John 8. Her accusers tried to trap Jesus by asking him what they should do with her since the Law of Moses made provisions for stoning someone caught in the act of adultery.

If Jesus said stone her they would have reported his words to the Roman authorities since Jews did not have that power as subjects of Rome. If he said don’t stone her they would have spread the word that he undermined the Law of Moses. Jesus then said something remarkable to the accusers and to her. To the accusers he said **“He who is without sin let him cast the first stone” and to her he said, “Woman, where are your accusers? No one has condemned you. Neither do I. Go now and sin on more.”**

Thank be to God that Jesus is a friend of sinners because if he wasn’t then we could not be the friends of God (Jn. 15:15). And not only was Jesus a friend of sinners he even called them to follow him! This we see in our text that we read from Matthew when Jesus called him to be his disciple.

The text tells us that after Jesus said to Matthew “follow me” they went to his house and ate together. (That’s what friends do) But notice who Matthew was. He was a tax collector. His reputation was almost as good as the IRS’s reputation is today. Also notice the company. There was not just one tax collector but many, and there were lots of other sinners too. Why does Jesus eat with sinners? Because he loves people and people are sick (all of us, whether we realize it or not) and if we realize it then we should also realize that Jesus came to eat with us so he could give God’s friendship to us sin-sick sinners.

Brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ give the gift of friendship to someone in your life for Christmas.

Maybe there is a friendship that needs patching up. Take that first step to make that friendship right. That’s what God did for us and that’s what we ought to do as well. Maybe there is a friendship that needs a little more investment of your time. Put the time in the friendship. Say to that friend as Jesus said to his disciples **“come alongside me and see.”**

Maybe you need for God to bring a person in your life who is broken, lonely, and without a friend (not unlike yourself). Ask God to bring that person into your life and then go and be that person’s friend. Draw close to them and give to them the gift of your friendship so that they might encounter the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord.

In the name of God the Father **who loved us so much that sent his Son into the world to be an atoning sacrifice for our sins** (I Jn. 4:9-10), and in the name of the Son **who loved his friends so much that he laid his life down for them** (Jn. 15:13), and in the name of the Holy Spirit **who “breaks our hearts of stone” (Ez. 11:19) and takes what is Christ’s and makes it our own** (Jn. 14:15)...

Amen.