**“The Cross & Friendship”**

**Series #4: At The Cross**

Isaiah 12:1-6; 2 Cor. 5:16-21; John 15:9-17; Psalm 32 3.31.19

Summary: The Cross created a situation where the Son of God would call us His friends. How can that be?

Intro:

\* I wonder why it’s such a compliment to tell a woman she looks like a breath of spring, but not to tell her she looks like the end of hard winter. Isn’t it the same thing?

\* I wonder why it pleases her to say time stands still when you look into her face, but not to say her face would stop a clock. Why?

\* I wonder why people who punish a child for lying will tell the same child when they answer the phone for you, "Just say I’m not home."

\* I wonder why a speaker who "needs no introduction" gets one anyway. It seems curious.

\* I wonder why, when the preacher says, "In closing..." he doesn’t.

Many things in this world could cause us to WONDER. But one of the most striking is that God should want to call us His FRIENDS.

In John 15:14-15 Jesus said:

*"You are my FRIENDS if you do what I command. 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."*

"FRIENDS." That Jesus would call us FRIENDS somehow defies imagination. One of the primary reasons that would be difficult to imagine is because of what we find written in Romans 5:6-8 *"You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for THE UNGODLY. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God DEMONSTRATES HIS OWN LOVE for us in this: While we WERE STILL SINNERS, Christ died for us."*

In the next three verse of Romans 5 tells us we were His enemies:

*9 “Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. 10 For IF while we were ENEMIES we were RECONCILED to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are RECONCILED, shall we be saved by his life. 11 More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received RECONCILIATION.”*

There is a difference between RECONCILIATION and FORGIVENESS. In the cross, Jesus provided for the forgiveness of EVERYONE. But NOT everyone will be RECONCILED with Him – BECAUSE they won’t seek to be reconciled with Him. Dietrich Bonhoeffer forgave his Nazi guards, but he was never reconciled with them. The same is true for you. You can forgive anyone who hurts you, even if they don’t seek your reconciliation.

We are so blessed because we are forgiven at the cross, our old flesh is crucified at the cross, because of the cross we are now more fruitful,

AND . . .

**I.** **The Cross Is The Highest Expression Of Friendship.**

It is the highest expression of friendship because that is the place where Jesus willingly laid down His perfect life for each of us.

John 15: 13 tells us *"Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his FRIENDS."*

The symbol of the cross is so important to our relationships that God even used it for marriage:

Ephesians 5:25 *"Husbands love your wives, JUST AS Christ loved the Church and gave Himself up for her."* There is no greater love we can show to another than to sacrifice for them.

Illus: 1994 OCEANSlDE, Calif. (AP) In Mr. Alter’s fifth-grade class it’s impossible to tell which boy is undergoing chemotherapy. Nearly all the boys are bald. Thirteen of them shaved their heads so a sick buddy wouldn’t feel out of place.

"If everybody has their head shaved, sometimes people don’t know who’s who. They don’t know who has cancer, and who just shaved their head" said 11-yeat-old Scott Sebelius, one of the baldies at Lake Elementary School. For the record, Ian O’Gorman is the sick one.

Doctors recently removed a malignant tumor from his small intestine, and a week ago he started chemotherapy to treat the disease, called lymphoma.

"Besides surgery, I had tubes up my nose. I had butterflies in my stomach" said Ian, who’ll have eight more weeks of chemotherapy in an effort to keep the cancer from returning.

Ian decided to get his head shaved before all his hair fell out in clumps. To his surprise, his friends wanted to join him - in a move reminiscent of the 1992 U.S. Olympic volleyball players, who shaved their heads in a show of solidarity with a bald teammate.

"The last thing he would want is to not fit in, to be made fun of, so we just wanted to make him feel better and not left out" said 10-year-old Kyle Hanslik.

Kyle started talking to other boys about the idea, and then one of their parents started a list. Last week, they all went to the barber shop together.

"It’s hard to put words to," said Ian’s father, Shawn, choking back tears as he talked about the boys. "It’s very emotional to think about kids like that who would come together, to have them do such a thing to support Ian." The boys’ teacher, Jim Alter, was so inspired that he, too, shaved his head.

You see, that’s what friends, real friends, do for one another.

Now, I’ve been through chemo and immunotherapy, and in treatment right now, and yes, I shave my head, but you don’t need to shave your heads. I love you all just the same and call you my friends because God has called you His FRIENDS.

Not only is the cross the highest expression for FRIENDSHIP . . .

**II.** **The Cross Is An Expression Of Life.** (in God’s friendship we have life).

In John 15:16 Jesus told His disciples: "*I chose you*."

Illus: The TV news program 20/20 once had a segment on baby chicks that were packaged and marketed. These tiny chicks traveled on conveyer belts past workers who selected them to fit into a box to be shipped out and sold. The chicks were CHOSEN by sex, size, general appearance. But some were NOT CHOSEN. The cameras followed these baby chicks as they slipped by the workers and fell off the end of the conveyer belt… to die. That’s the way of this world. If you don’t fit into the box, you’re rejected and left to die.

The cross declares that this is NOT the way God deals with us. We are not on some kind of human conveyor belt. And God DOESN’T CHOOSE us because we fit into a box. He CHOOSES us because He LOVES us.

I John 4:10 tells us "*This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins."* In CHOOSING us, God chose to GIVE US LIFE. That’s why the resurrection naturally follows Christ’s crucifixion - He could’ve said….. "We’ll wait till the end of time to raise Jesus from the dead," but He didn’t. Jesus was in the tomb only 3 short days just as he had said he would be. And His resurrection is the promise to us that we are CHOOSEN to be raised with Him forever to dwell with Him in heaven.

The cross is the highest expression of friendship and an expression of life,

And Lastly. . .

**III.** **The Cross Is An Expression Of What Jesus Desires Of Us.**

John 15:12 and 17 *"My command is this* (Jesus repeated it a second time) "*Love one another as I have loved you."*

I John repeats this for us 3:16-18:

*“This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth."*

Jesus says the same thing in John 13:35 *"By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

Why is this command repeated so often? BECAUSE the cross symbolizes highest form of FRIENDSHIP. "*Take up your cross and follow me*" – This is what Jesus has expressed for each of us to do. Our crosses, whatever kind of burdens they may be in this life, physical, emotional, relational, are so little compared to the cross of Christ.

Jesus demands that as much as is possible with us that we live at peace with others. (Romans 12:18) That means we are to do our part in reconciling with others.

For example, let's say that we have had a quarrel between us and a friend. We forsake our pride and do whatever needs to be done to break down the barrier, to make it right. But, when we eat this humble pie, our old friend will have none of it. Suppose he looks us in the eye and says, "Look, I've met your kind before. After what you said and did the other day I don't care what you do to make up for it. I'll never call you friend again." What can we do? We have removed the cause of the trouble as far as it is in our power to do so. We have expressed our intention to be friends again. Just as it takes two to quarrel it takes two to reconcile. Reconciliation is available but because one party is unwilling there is no reconciliation. It is the same with God.

Some parting questions for each of us:

First of all, are you reconciled with God? Have you accepted His terms of peace? If not yet, His terms are visible, right there at the cross!

Second, are you living as a friend of God? Do you enjoy His kind of people to hang out with? Do you enjoy hearing from God?

Finally, are there relationships in your life that need reconciliation? Is there anything you can initiate to do your part to live at peace?

Sometimes it even takes a SACRIFICE on our part to bring reconciliation.

CLOSE:

In 1969, Supreme Court Justice Hugo L. Black celebrated his 83rd birthday. His colleague, frequent opponent and good friend, John Marshall Harlan, sent him a birthday letter. This is a simple gesture for most men, but Justice Harlan was almost totally blind. To sign an opinion, he found it necessary to turn on a massive set of lights that had been installed above his desk and use a large, single lens magnifying glass. With the glass on his eye actually touching the paper, ...he would struggle painfully to complete his signature. It was the only writing he ever did.

The birthday note to Justice Black covered a page. When he had read it, Black folded it and put it carefully in his pocket, then turned his back on his clerk for a few minutes. When he turned around, his eyes were full of tears. "He wrote it himself," he said.

No act we can do can impress others as much as SACRIFICE on our part.

*“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”* (John 15:12-13)

Jesus laid down His precious life for you and calls you His friend.

**Prayer:** Thank You Jesus, for the cross, and that You call me Your friend. Amen.