

15th Sunday after Pentecost September 18, 2022

THANK GOD FOR FAITHFUL FRIENDS WHO WOUND AND SHARPEN US

Proverbs 27:5-6,9,17

Scripture Readings

1 Samuel 20:27-42

John 15:1-17

Hymns

3, 457, 464, 50

Hymns from The Lutheran Hymnal (1941) unless otherwise noted

+ *In the Name of Jesus Christ* +

Dear friends in Christ,

Of all of Pixar's computer animated movies, I think it's safe to say that the four "Toy Story" movies are their most popular films. Maybe you saw it as a child or you watched it with your children or grandchildren. And of all the songs written for Pixar movies, I think the theme song to "Toy Story" is probably the most memorable. Songwriter Randy Newman wrote the song "You've Got a Friend in Me" about the friendship of the toy cowboy Woody and his boy-owner, Andy. One line of the song goes like this:

*"You've got troubles, I've got 'em too;
There isn't anything I wouldn't do for you;
We stick together and see it through;
'Cause you've got a friend in me."*

That's a pretty good summary of friendship. Yeah, we may both have troubles, but we stick together and see it through, because we are friends. Friends see each other through difficult times. As Solomon writes in Proverbs 17, "***A friend loves at all times.***"

The Bible is full of examples of friends. This morning in our Old Testament reading, we heard of the very close friendship between Jonathan and David. Even though Jonathan SHOULD have been the next king of Israel, God had chosen the young shepherd boy David to be the next king of Israel. Yet the Bible says that the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David and he loved David as his own soul. Such is the bond of Christian friendship.

While the Bible gives other examples of friendship, there is none greater than the Friend of sinners, Jesus Christ. Think of all the times Jesus demonstrated His friendship by dining with those despised by others or how He would take the time to heal the sick and answer the call for help. On the night before Jesus died, He called His weak and often confused disciples His "friends."

As we think about friends, what kind of friends do you surround yourself with? Do you want a friend who sugar coats everything and always tells you how great you are, even when that is not true? Or do you want a friend who is truly honest with you, even when it hurts to hear the truth? And with that, what kind of friend do you want to be to others?

As we listen to the wisdom of Solomon in Proverbs 27, remember the theme for Proverbs is this: “*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*” (Prov. 9:10) As you stand in awe of Jesus who calls you His friend and died for you, listen to what Solomon says of friendship in chapter 27, verses 5 and 6, 9 and 17:

*Better is open rebuke
than hidden love.
Faithful are the wounds of a friend;
profuse are the kisses of an enemy.*

*Oil and perfume make the heart glad,
and the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel.*

*Iron sharpens iron,
and one man sharpens another.*

This is God’s Word.

Anne Shirley was convinced that Diana Barry was her “true kindred spirit” and “bosom friend” even before they met. In the book “Anne of Green Gables” readers are introduced to imaginative and spirited Anne. In the book, Anne and Diana do indeed become “bosom friends.” So, when Diana’s parents wouldn’t allow her to be seen with Anne, she was an emotional wreck and depressed. Such was the close friendship of Anne and Diana. Maybe you’ve had a friendship like Anne with someone you considered to be a “kindred spirit.”

How does God want “kindred spirits” to treat each other? Listen again to God’s wisdom about friendship in Proverbs 27. We start with verses 5 and 6: “***Better is open rebuke than hidden love. Faithful are the wounds of a friend; profuse are the kisses of an enemy.***” We find here two thoughts that convey different kinds of pain. “Rebuke” is a sharp correction that can be mentally and emotionally painful. The Hebrew for “wounds” here means to “split” or “tear” something open. The faithful wounds of a friend are not physical but emotional, done with words.

While neither are pleasant, we realize both are necessary at times. Solomon writes of rebuke in Proverbs 17, “***Rebuke is more effective for a wise man Than a hundred blows on a fool***”. Those who are wise, those who fear the LORD, long for rebuke when they’ve sinned. So, thank God for faithful friends who love you enough to rebuke and wound you in love. Think of the friend who told you that the person you were dating were dating was not good for you because they saw how that other person was changing you. Or what about when your friend told that you had a drinking problem. Or the friend who told you that spending too much time at the office was ruining your marriage and family.

Those open rebukes and wounds from our friends may hurt us emotionally, but Solomon reminds us that when they come from a friend, they are faithful, reliable, or trustworthy. They are better than hidden love or the kisses of an enemy. Hidden love is a love that never shows itself in meaningful, honest, and sincere ways. Kisses may feel more pleasant than wounds, but those pleasant feeling kisses can be given by an enemy—like that of Judas when he betrayed Jesus with a kiss.

So, we see the God-given wisdom of having friends that are honest with us. Those are the type of Christians friends we should surround ourselves with. Isaiah describes us all as being like sheep that have gone astray. We so easily stray into sin with our sinful speech, sinful actions, sinful habits. We need Christian friends who love us enough to openly rebuke and even wound us with God’s Law. We need them to show us our sin, lest we be dragged further and further away from God in unrepentance.

Think of the Prophet Nathan that was sent to King David to confront him about his sins of adultery, murder, and lying. Having rebuked and wounded David with God’s Law, David repented, confessing, **“I have sinned against the LORD.”** The Prophet Nathan then immediately assured David that God had put away his sin and that he would not die. These are the rebukes and wounds that friends make. Did you know that King David went on to name one of his sons, “Nathan”? That is something that friends do. King David valued the wounds that the Prophet Nathan gave him in love.

These are the kind of friends we should surround ourselves with and these are the kind of friends we should be with one another. Friends that rebuke and wound each other in love when we have sinned against the LORD, rather than ignoring unrepentant sin like the profuse kissing of an enemy. But we rebuke and wound so that we can heal with the love of Christ and tell of His amazing grace. Like Nathan to David, tell your repentant friend how our Friend Jesus was wounded for our transgressions and that by His wounds we are healed. Thank God for faithful friends that wound us in Christian love.

God’s wisdom on friendship continues in verse 9, **“Oil and perfume make the heart glad, and the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel.”** The Hebrew here is rather challenging to capture in English. What the ESV here translates as “earnest,” the King James translates as “hearty.” The Hebrew word here is usually translated as “soul” or “nephesh” in Hebrew. While we don’t usually speak of “soul-counsel” in English, rendering it that way may help you capture what Solomon is expressing—*“the sweetness of a friend comes from his ‘soul counsel.’”* One of the things we value about friendship is the earnest, heartfelt counsel that comes from their soul. Such counsel is a sweet thing to receive from a good friend. As friends, we know that they love us and we want to know what they think about a matter. Their “soul counsel” makes our hearts glad—it is a sweet thing to hear.”

The open rebuke, the wounds of corrective words, and the earnest counsel of our friends brings us to one of my favorite verses in Proverbs: verse 17, **“Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.”** In Old Testament times, if you needed to sharpen a piece of iron like a sword, knife, or your plow, you would often use another piece of iron. By sharpening iron with iron BOTH iron pieces ended up sharpening each other. When our friends openly rebuke us in love, wound us with

their honesty, and give us their soulful counsel, it is intended to sharpen us. If no one sharpens us when we err, we become like a dull blade, worthless.

When we as a congregation of Christian friends use the Word of God to rebuke, wound, and counsel each other in love, we end up sharpening one another. That is part of our calling as fellow Christians. Paul writes of it to the Colossians, “***Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.***” (Colossians 3:16) The writer to the Hebrews puts it this way, “***let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.***” (Hebrews 10:24) Thank God for faithful Christian friends who love us enough to sharpen us as we follow Christ!

We all have had various experiences with our friends. Sometimes our friends let us down. Sometimes our friends change. Regardless of how your friends have treated you over the years, rejoice that Jesus calls you His friend. As His friend, Jesus hides nothing from you but in His Word speaks honestly to you. He speaks honestly to you about your sin, rebuking you when you stray from His loving commands, and then He comforts you with the sweetness of His soul-counsel. He tells you of how He rescued you from the hell you deserved by dying on the cross in your place. Rejoice that while your friends may change, Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

May the knowledge that you have an unchanging, loving Friend named Jesus spur you on to BE such a friend to others. May God the Holy Spirit help you to be a friend that loves at all times and in love rebukes and wounds when necessary, and that shares the sweetness of your soul-ful counsel. May this always be done in love that as Christian friends we would sharpen one another in our service to Jesus Christ, the Friend of sinners. Thank God for faithful friends. Amen.

—**Pastor Nathan Pfeiffer**

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