



Westminster Presbyterian Church

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March 10, 2019 Sermon

Friends Share All Things In Common: Jonathan and David, Jesus and His Disciples, God and Us

1 Samuel 18:1-4; 1 Samuel 18-20 (selected verses)

First Scripture Lesson:

"I do not call you servants any longer, but I have called you friends. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down his life for his friends."

Jesus says those words to his disciples, when he is about to lay down his life for them. The night on which he says them (we commemorate it as Maundy Thursday), he will be arrested; the next day (Good Friday), he will be condemned and crucified; two days later, Easter morning, the first Easter morning, he will be resurrected.

Today is the first Sunday of Lent, our 40-day period of preparation for Easter. During Lent, I plan to preach on those words in hopes that they will acquire a deeper meaning for us, and Easter, therefore, acquire a deeper

The first step is to gain a deeper understanding of what friendship meant in Jesus' world, the Ancient Greek and Roman world. In his book, *The Four Loves*, C.S. Lewis says:

"To the ancient world, friendship seemed the happiest and the most fully human of all loves; the crown of life and the school of virtue. In comparison, the modern world ignores it."

That may be an overstatement, but not by much. "You could have all the other goods in the world," the ancient moralist said, "but without friendship, a human life wouldn't be worth living; it wouldn't even be human."

Few of us, today, I think, would put it that strongly. So to appreciate what Jesus says in calling his disciples—in calling us—his friends, we have appreciate the ancient way of seeing friendship.

Start with one of the most famous friendships in the Bible, the friendship of Jonathan and David. Jonathan is the son of the present king, King Saul, But it is David, the shepherd boy from nowhere, the kid who took down Goliath, who is destined by God to become the next king. You'd think that would incite envy, suspicion, even hatred on Jonathan's part. Not at all. It does on Saul's part, but not on Jonathan's.

Like many a friendship, the friendship of Jonathan and David is made solemn by a vow of loyalty, and that vow is enacted with a ritual—in this case, the sharing of armor. Listen now for God's Word reading from 1 Samuel 18:1-4:

When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house. Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that he was wearing, and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt.

Second Scripture Lesson:

So what happens to Jonathan and David? A lot. I'm going to quote selectively from 1 Samuel chapters 18-20 to tell the story. Start here: 1 Samuel 18:

The next day an evil spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he raved within his house, while David was playing the lyre, as he did day by day. Saul had his spear in his hand; and Saul threw it at David. But David eluded him twice. Saul was afraid of David, because the Lord was with him.

Having failed to pin David to the wall, Saul offers David the hand of his daughter, Michal, in marriage. But only on the condition that he first slay a ridiculously large number of Philistines: Chapter 18, verse 21:

Saul thought, "Let me give her to him that she may be a snare for him and that the hand of the Philistines may be against him." . . . Now Saul planned to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines. But as often as the Philistines came out, David had even more success in battle, so that his fame became very great.

So Saul's raving gets worse. Chapter 19, verse 1:

Saul spoke with his son Jonathan and with all his servants about killing David. But Saul's son Jonathan took great delight in David. Jonathan told David, "My father Saul is trying to kill you; therefore be on guard tomorrow morning; stay in a secret place and hide yourself, and I will speak to my father about you."

Jonathan does speak to Saul, and does manage to win a reprieve for David—temporarily. But then the Philistines attack again, David has even greater success in battle, his fame grows even greater, as does Saul's rage. So again with the spear, 19:9:

Then an evil spirit from the Lord came upon Saul, as he sat in his house with his spear in his hand, while David was playing music. Saul sought to pin David to the wall with the spear; but David eluded him; he fled and escaped into the night. Saul sent messengers to David's house to keep watch over him, planning to kill him in the morning.

This time it's Michal, David's wife, who helps him to escape. David runs farther away now, but Jonathan comes to find him. Jonathan promises to sound out his father again, and return to David with news of whether he can return. Jonathan says to David (20:13):

"If my father intends to do you harm, may the Lord do so to me, and more also, if I do not tell you, and send you away, so that you may go in safety."

And by now Jonathan's own life is at risk, and he knows it. He says to David (20:14):

If I am still alive, show me the faithful love of the Lord; but if I die, never cut off your faithful love from my house. Thus Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, and he made David swear again by his love for him; for he loved him as he loved his own life.

This time, however, when Jonathan pleads with Saul, he does not relent; instead he grows furious with Jonathan, and now throws his spear at **him**. 20:30:

Then Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan. He said to him, "You son of a perverse, rebellious woman! Do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame, Then Jonathan answered his father Saul, "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" But Saul threw his spear at to strike him; so Jonathan knew that it was the decision of his father to put David to death.

So Jonathan returns to David, to say good-bye for the last time chapter 20 verse 42:

They kissed each other, and wept with each other; David wept the more. Then Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the Lord, saying, 'The Lord is the bond between you and me, and between my descendants and your descendants, forever.'" David got up and left; and Jonathan went back into the city.

Sermon:

"Friends share all things in common." So the ancient proverb, and so Jonathan and David.

In the ancient world, your armor was your life: it was custom-made, as personal as a big league baseball player's glove or bats, and more than anything else, it was what kept you alive in battle. And Jonathan puts it all—not only his armor, but also his sword, bow and belt—he puts it all in David's hands. And as for David? Well, he puts his very life in Jonathan's hands.

"A friend is a second self, another me." So the ancient proverb, and so Jonathan and David:

"Jonathan loved David, loved David as his own life, as his own soul." And as for David? Well, when he hears of Jonathan's death in battle, David cries: "My brother Jonathan; greatly beloved were you to me; your love to me was wonderful, surpassing the love of women."

A friend always wants what is good for his friend, simply for his friend's own sake. In fact, such is the bond of friendship, that their good is always one and the same. So the ancient definition of friendship. And so Jonathan and David. This is their covenant, their promise, their bond to one another: that they will always act together, do right by one another, seek the same good, have the same good—no matter how difficult, no matter how dangerous.

And David's life is in danger—Saul is raving—and he trusts Jonathan to save it. But so is Jonathan's. You can tell this by what says as he leaves David to plead with Saul the second time: "*If I am still alive*, he says to David, show me the faithful love of the Lord; *but if I die*, never cut off your faithful love from my house. Thus Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David."

True Friendship knows no end. It is forever. So the ancient proverb, and so Jonathan and David. These are Jonathan's parting words to David:

"Then Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the Lord, saying, 'The Lord is the bond between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants forever.'"

Forever. We have sworn friendship with each other—forever. Nowadays, we would say, "BFF" (Best Friends Forever). Of course, Jonathan and David don't say quite that, but it's what they mean. What they do say is this:

"You are my friend. Friends share all things in common. Everything I have is yours. You are my second self. We are one soul. My good is your good; and your good is my good. We will be together; we will delight in one another—forever. This is our covenant—this is our bond—in the Lord, and it is strong, stronger even than death. And I will die to make it so."

Remarkable that the son of the king would be such a friend to the one who was destined to take the throne in his stead. Even more remarkable that the son of God would be such a friend to human beings who wanted to live without God, as if there were no God, as if we were God.

"I do not call you servants any longer, but I have called you friends. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down his life for his friends." Jesus says this not only to his immediate disciples, but also to us here today.

Friendship has always had its rituals along with its vows. Jonathan gives David his armor and weapons. In the New Testament, the premier ritual of friendship is sharing a meal—breaking bread—together. And in our culture today, although we have any number of such rituals, foremost among them is sharing a meal—eating and drinking together. That's what we do with our friends. Certainly that's what we're doing here today at the communion table.

Take this bread, and eat: this is my body broken for you; take this cup and drink—this is the cup of the new covenant sealed in my blood for the forgiveness of sins.

What Jesus is saying, to both his immediate disciples and to us, is this:

"You are my friends. Friends share all things in common. Everything I have is yours. You are my second self. We are one soul. My good is your good; and your good is my good. We will be together; we will delight in one another—forever. That is our covenant—that is our bond—in the Lord, and it is strong, stronger even than death. And I will die to make it so."

Here today at this table, Jesus calls us his friends.

May his friendship be ours today, during this Lenten season, and forever.

Amen.