

Sixth Sunday of Easter

Year B

Acts 10:25-26, 34-35, 44-48

Ps 98:1, 2-3, 3-4

I Jn 4:7-10

Jn 15:9-17

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We have arrived at a very important time of the year. America waits with baited breath for the approach of an annual ritual. No, I'm not talking about graduations, First Communion, and the first barbecue of the summer. I'm talking about Summer Movie Blockbuster Season. Whether it was *Jaws* back in 1975 (and I know people who still won't go into the ocean because of that film), or *Mission Impossible 3* and *The DaVinci Code* today, we just can't seem to get enough of the movies. We wait in line for hours (or at least we did until you could buy your tickets on-line. Some of us can remember waiting in line for "E.T." or "Star Wars"), saddle up to the concession stand, pick out our seats and settle in for a few hours of cinematic bliss until the final credits role and we move on.

But even amid all the hype and special effects, the movies that seem to hold a lasting place in our hearts are the classic "buddy movies." I'm talking about the films where either a pair or a group of friends stands by one another no matter what. They may fight, they inevitably have serious challenges which test the limits of friendship, but in the end, their friendships endure and even grow stronger. These movies have a lasting impression because they illustrate what we desire. We all desire the strong bonds of friendship. We seek out people with whom we can share our joys and our struggles, with whom we can let down our guard and simply "be ourselves." We all need to have people in our lives who will always support us, who will believe in us even as they challenge us to become better women and men. Above all, we all desire to know that someone else loves us with an unconditional love.

In the gospel you just heard, Jesus calls the disciples (and us) to be his friends. That sounds all warm and fuzzy and Sunday school-like on the surface, but into what kind of relationship are we being invited by Christ? What does it mean to be part of a true friendship with God?

Well, Jesus tells us what it is not. It is not the relationship of a master and a slave. It is not about blind obedience to some Unknowable Deity, no matter how benevolent that deity might be. Slaves obey orders without knowledge. They act without being invited into the conversation about the larger picture and thus have no real vested interest in the rest of the master's vision. Even in the best case scenario, where the greatest of the Prophets and Kings such as Moses and David were called "Doulos" or "Slaves of God," a title that was considered a high honor and worthy of great respect, even then there was a lack of direct connection to the so-called master.

When Jesus called his disciples his friends, he invited them into an entirely new level of relationship with God, one enjoyed by very few people in history (Abraham comes to mind). So Jesus, to steal from the great chef Emeril, "kicked it up a notch."

Jesus invited these men and women to be intimately involved with his own life with the Father. He invited them to share in his own joy, his own pain, his own being and desired the permission to enter into their own stories as well. He invited them *into a mutual relationship*...nothing one-sided, nothing hidden, nothing oppressive, nothing to fear. He invited them to become one with him as he is one with the Father.

He invites us into that relationship as well. He has CHOSEN you to be his friend. He has chosen you for Joy. This does not mean that everything will always be a-ok. This is not a continual state of happiness akin to an adrenaline rush. True Joy means existing in a state of hope and peace, even when things become difficult. To live in Joy means to trust that your friends are with you, that God is with you always.

He has chosen you for Love. This is a love that knows no boundaries. You have been chosen to love others as you are loved by God. You have been chosen to love yourselves enough to live up to your potential, to live with integrity, to know that you are worthy of the respect and love of others. You have been chosen *to give that love away* and help those you encounter, from the love of your life to the woman behind the cash register, to the homeless man on the street, love themselves enough to live up to *their* potential, to live with integrity and to know that *they too* are worthy of love and respect. God's love recognizes none of the artificial boundaries of race, gender, orientation, political affiliation, social class, creed, or ethnicity to which we too often become enslaved. God's love is unconditional and unconditional love is what you are invited to give and receive.

Jesus has chosen you to abide in that unconditional love. Love challenges us when we are weak and lifts us up when we are strong. To abide...to live in such love demands that we engage in relationship with God and each other. It demands that we laugh and play together, study and question all of creation together, cry on each other's shoulders, challenge each other and lift each other up when we fall. To live in this love means finding time to be still and recognize God in your midst and to listen for the sound of his voice as we choose the paths we travel. To live in this love means reaching out to both strangers *and* close friends in times of trouble. To live in this love is to recognize how much we NEED to live in this love, how much we need Christ in our lives. To live in this love is to desire that Jesus Christ be our closest companion and to live that out in the relationships we have with all of those around us.

Finally, Jesus has chosen you to be SENT out into the world to invite others into that same love given to him by the Father and to you by the Son. You are called not to be shielded, not to ignore or be blinded to the realities of our world, but to be living witnesses of that joy and love in which we have been invited to live. Everything you have ever said, everything you have ever done, everything you have ever learned has helped shape who you are. All of that will now be put to the test. Will you block others out, or will you reach out and allow all you have become shape the world we live in? Will you speak words of justice in the face of injustice? Will you stand up for the rights of the poor, the marginalized and the oppressed? Will you use your power as educated women and men to advance the cause of truth? Will you recognize all human beings, here and around the world, as your family in Christ? Will you live for yourself alone, or will you accept Jesus' invitation to enter into true friendship with him and his world? Will you accept the call to abide in his love, to become one body, one spirit in Christ?

Our story is still being told. While some scenes are now, as they say in Hollywood, “in the can,” there is still much more to be written and lived in the story of your lives. Our life with Christ, our collective lives as companions on the journey, is more spectacular than any other story ever shown on a stage or screen. We have been invited to become one, in true and everlasting friendship, with the Creator of anything that ever was or ever will be. You have been invited to a life of true Love.