

1<sup>st</sup> Lesson: Acts 10:44-48

2<sup>nd</sup> Lesson: 1 John 5:1-6

Gospel Lesson: John 15:9-17 (Sermon based on this)

What does it take to forge a friendship? Well, the answer to this question will probably vary depending on who you ask. Two guys who have been buddies since college might tell you that friendship requires a shared experience that binds you together for a lifetime. Ask three girlfriends who share shopping and coffee together every Saturday and they'll say it's about having common interests over which you can connect. A group of inseparable 7-year-old boys will likely tell you that it helps to have a mutual admiration for all things Ironman, as well as moms who let you hang out at one another's houses after school. All great answers.

But what if you never went to college, hate shopping, and grew up with overprotective parents who kept you away from comic books and other kids? What does it take to forge a great friendship now? Well, according to Scott Rosenbaum, a great friend can still be had for about 10 bucks an hour. That's right, Rosenbaum is the founder of "RentAFriend.com" a service that's designed to connect you -- for a fee -- with a great friend for almost any situation.

Are you in need of a buddy to hang out with at the game? Are you dying to see the latest Blockbuster movie but don't want to watch it at the theater or at home on-demand, or by yourself? Maybe you're looking for someone to seek advice from, who won't spill your secrets to other friends and family? If the answer is "Yes," then Rosenbaum thinks you should consider clicking over to his site.

Now, no matter how you feel about the website Rent a friend, the fact of its existence, and of its apparent popularity, speaks volumes about the world we currently live in, and about human beings in general. We are people who crave connection. Even without Rosenbaum's website there is still Facebook, which currently has over 3 billion active users. The average user has roughly 338 friends -- that is to say, 338 people who read your status, see your "likes" and creep on your pictures. And yet even in a world where you can have up

to 5,000 "friends on Facebook" and up to 5,000 "followers" on Twitter (now known as X), we still need more and have the ability to feel deeply and utterly alone.

The truth is that Facebook friendships, and Rosenbaum's rented friendships, can only do so much. They're kind of like "Diet Friendships." You know, compared to the real thing they contain just some of the taste and little of the substance. If you ask the average person, "How many friends do you *really* have?" they aren't going to put up 338 fingers. No, the truth is that *if they have any deep friendships*, they can probably count them on one hand. Meaningful connections -- the kind that take more than clicking "Yes" on a friend request, or paying 10 bucks an hour -- are harder to come by. And yet our very willingness to settle for something, anything, that might connect us to others proves our deep, created need for something more.

In John chapter 15, our Gospel this morning, Jesus is in the middle of his "farewell discourse." It's a series of teachings given to the disciples in the waning hours of his ministry that is aimed at preparing them, and us, for life as his people long after his death, resurrection and ascension. And in this particular section, Jesus speaks to the kind of connection he longs to see between those who will claim to be his obedient disciples. "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. You are my friends if you do what I command you."

It may sound simple, but Jesus' desire is that his church, this community of baptized, forgiven and faith-filled disciples, be a place of true, loving friendship. Jesus' command is that this place becomes the one place in the world, if not the **premier place**, where your craving for a loving connection can be satisfied. Let that sink in. Christ wants us to be friends. Not rented friends, or Facebook friends, not surface-level only, "Diet soda" kind of friends, but loving, life-giving, deeply satisfying and intimately connected friends.

Maybe that's not a shock to you. Maybe you're already experiencing that. But... perhaps it is a brand new idea for you. Maybe it's never even crossed your mind that life in God's family is meant to be more than an event you attend with other Christians, but

something that is lived out through a deep connection and community with other Christians. These days it seems that people tend to talk about their faith in isolated, subjective, and personal terms. It's about a "personal connection" to Jesus, their own "walk" with Jesus, or an individual understanding of Jesus. And yet, after one read through of John's gospel -- especially in the waning hours of Jesus' ministry -- you can't help but get the sense that for Jesus such talk misses the point entirely. Jesus' greatest concern upon leaving this earth was not a faith we'd live out as loners, but whether or not we'd live out our faith in harmony, community, and friendship together.

So, how's that going for you? To put it bluntly, do you have any friends here? Not just faces you know and names you can recite, but people whose lives you share, whose faith encourages you, whose truth corrects you and presence comforts you? Do you? If the answer is "No," then that's okay, but you should probably pay attention to what Jesus says to us in John's narrative today. Because in our story this morning Jesus offers us a beautiful description of what we should be aiming for as a community of faith, and you've been missing out on it if you're one of those who has no meaningful connections in this family of faith. In fact, you could boil it down to two things: sharing and sacrifice.

Let's start with sharing. In verse 15 Jesus goes on to say, "... no longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you." What's amazing about this statement is that Jesus Christ -- the Son of God and Savior of the world -- refers to us, his disciples as *friends*. And the reason he considers his followers friends is because of what he's shared, what he's revealed and made known to us. In revealing the gospel, the fact that God is reconciling the world, reconciling you, to God through the work of Christ on the cross -- and doing so free of charge with no strings attached -- Jesus is revealing the heart of God, an unveiling that's been a mystery to the rest of mankind, and making himself vulnerable to rejection and abuse. That isn't something you do with minions; that kind of revelation and vulnerability is the kind of thing you do with family and friends, those that you love.

In the same way, in living as his people, people who are called to connect deeply and richly with one another, we can't accomplish this without pursuing relationships of significant sharing. That isn't to say that one should walk around the church revealing his or her deepest sins to everyone who walks in the door. "Hi! My name is Vince and I used to have a gambling problem." No, that would be weird. But there should be some people, who should get to see us for who we really are, ideally individuals who share our faith in Christ who, as a result can speak truth to us, or give comfort to us, in ways in which few others in this world can.

The second piece is sacrifice. Jesus could not be clearer on this. In a true community of love -- the kind he wants us to be -- friends will readily and regularly give their lives for one another. Sure, there may not be ample opportunities to literally take a bullet for your best friend, but sacrifice happens in all kinds of ways. It's an attitude that says, "I love you, more than I love myself" and affects all kinds of simple, everyday actions. A true friend is someone who keeps your preferences in mind, who passes on what they want in order to offer what you need, and who refuses to fight for his or her rights, but when it comes to you, aims to serve your interests. Is there anyone here who is doing that for you? Are you embracing that attitude with anyone here? Are we that kind of community?

Are we friends? Are we sharing? Are we sacrificing? Do we love one another and embody the kind of connection that Christ has modeled for us and commanded of us? In verse 9, Jesus gives us an invitation. "Abide in my love," he says. In fact, it's clear that Jesus sees our friendship among one another as an outgrowth, or a fruit of abiding, of dwelling, and resting in the love he's given to us. In other words, you can't be for others what you aren't regularly receiving from Christ.

You may not have a great friend in this place, and you may not be a great friend in this place, but what you first need to know is that Christ is, and will always be, your friend in this place. He has shared with you the heart of God, making known his heart of love and an unending grace that freely flows from his work on the cross. In him you have a savior who has taken a beating for you, who was bruised, bloodied, bullied, and murdered for you. You

have a friend who rose again, ascended into heaven, and now lovingly rules over and orchestrates every event in this world in a way that will ultimately glorify God, yet benefit you.

What a friend we have in Jesus. We're forgiven for all that we've been unwilling to share and the walls we've insisted on leaving up. We are washed clean through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross for all that we have been unwilling to sacrifice for others. Rest on that. Dwell on that. And in light of that, seek to be the kind of friend -- here, in this place -- that's radically shaped by that. And when you do --- think of the ills in this place that will be silenced by the roaring fullness of our friendship; - think of the depression among us that will dissipate, the loneliness in some of us that will no longer linger, the guilt and shame that will be lifted by the sharing of our struggles and the proclamation of the gospel; - think of how through sacrifice the pile of bills among one family could be paid by another; - think of how the pursuit of one another's interests could lead to fights that end and bickering that never brews; - think about the peace that Christ brings to us, as our friend, now flowing through us as we seek to be better friends with one another and with God.

What kind of message might this send to the rest of the world? We're people who crave community. God created us to crave significant relationships rallied around a common connection. That's what draws us to build families and hang out with friends. It's so wired in us that we'll form a community of friends around just about anything. Take reality television as proof. *Cake Boss* on TLC is about people who connect around making dessert. *Extreme Couponing* is about people who connect around the craving for a deal. *Storage Wars* is about people trying to buy units that have been abandoned in the hopes of hitting pay dirt. We're to be people connected -- deeply, richly and eternally -- around Christ. We believe that what he offers is better than anything you can find elsewhere or rent by the hour.

Are you skeptical? Well, there's only one way to find out. Take up Jesus' invitation. Abide in him. Share with his people. Sacrifice yourself for someone around you. Do that and see what you experience. If it doesn't work out, well, hey. There's always [www.RentAFriend.com](http://www.RentAFriend.com). Amen.