

North West Wiltshire Pastorate
Worship for Sunday May 9th 2021

Welcome to worship today.
Jesus's words are very clear;
It is the greatest love of all, to lay down your life for another,
for a friend.
We all understand and acknowledge
that cost,
but we come seeking greater understanding
of what it means to be called a friend.
Of what it means to have a friend.
Of what it means to be regarded as a friend of Jesus.
So let us worship God.

Our opening prayer today comes from the ROOTS Lectionary resource.
Let us pray

Creator God,
You have called us to worship you,
chosen us to be your friends
and invited us to extend that friendship
to all your people in all the world.
May we live as Jesus lived,
serve as he served,
and love as he loved,
to the glory of your name,
Amen.

We sing together "Beauty For Brokenness".
<https://youtu.be/EZwaEVWBkfl>

Those of us of a certain generation will recall the American series *Friends* which ran for 10 years and 10 series, 1994-2004. It followed 6 individuals who lived in New York, similar backgrounds, similar ages, similar lifestyles ... you get the picture.

Devotees hung onto their lives, there was a famous hairstyle which was copied, remember 'the Rachel?' we sympathised with the neuroses of Chandler and laughed at Joey's antics.

It was a manufactured friendship, but for that 30 minute episode we could enter a world of make believe, and we loved it.

What is friendship?

What does it mean to have a friend and to be called a friend?

And perhaps a question we rarely consider – what makes a friendship, does it include a discussion about boundaries, set times to meet? What is it a friendship based on?

And finally, when we claim Jesus's friendship, do we do so with a full or at least, a realistic understanding of the implications of the claim or do we do so believing it is our right?

Our readings today come from John's gospel, chapter 15, and verses 9-17 and the 1st letter of John, chapter 5, and verses 1-6.

What does it mean to be and be called a friend?

Amongst his last words of advice and instruction Jesus told his followers to keep his commandments and above all to 'love one another as I have loved you,' to do that would, as the gospel writer record it, elevate followers to the status of friends.

Make no mistake, to be regarded as a friend of Jesus was and is aspirational, although I would suggest that a 21st century interpretation has been considerably 'tweaked' from what it was at the start.

Because friendship itself, in its broadest terms has changed.

Consider for a moment the friendships you have – are they all the same?

Of course not,

Friends from school – who remember you way back when ...

From University or college –

From work, those who started out as colleagues and became friends.

Those we worship alongside who have become friends over time, friends through faith.

Friends acquired along life's way ... neighbours ... those met through a common cause ...

And these days we have virtual 'friends' – from different forms of social media.

One size clearly does not fit all.

The call of Jesus is to be alongside him, it isn't a master/servant scenario but that does not mean we claim the seat and fail to look around us to see who is missing and ask why that may be. As rarely we read the terms and conditions before signing or 'clicking', perhaps we need to re-read the 'T's & C's' of an honest and realistic relationship with Jesus.

It isn't sufficient to consider and care only for those known and liked and of a similar background, ethos or culture, our gospel talks about boundary-crossing hospitality; not a naturally occurring friendship but one that is created as a gift of graciousness –

I love that idea, to me that could be friendship in its purest form and one that most replicates the friendship Jesus offers, full of meaning, a sign both of love and hope and a bond forged out of something less tangible but in some way much stronger.

John's letter leans heavily on family language and the earliest community of Jesus' followers would have understood their relationships in a similar way. But it also marries high aspirations with reality, such as the love/hate drama of closest siblings.

This family love then reaches out in a sacrificial love, a costly love which enfolds a global dimension, an aspect of an all-embracing love which the followers and friends of Jesus would not have comprehended because their world was significantly smaller than ours.

What does it mean to be called a friend?

What kind of friend are we – worthy of the title or not?

In the midst of all we are dealing with, is it even a question on our radar?
Consider the week that has just gone. What contact did you have with friends?
Actual or virtual? Long-standing or fairly new? Friends of faith or friends
without? Friends whose need is not equal to yours?
And most of all, do you believe yourself to be a friend of Jesus?
Amen.

Let us pray

Jesus,
Lord and Saviour;
Teacher and Friend.
So many titles are given to you
that often we fail to consider the differences.

As we think about the ideals and aspects of friendship,
We consider those who we call friends –
The links we have, the history we share;
the reasons why friendship has grown and stayed.

We think of those who call us friends in turn;
perhaps out of habit, maybe for reasons we refuse to re-evaluate.
As we grow from childhood, so too does true friendship grow,
and we recall and pray for those who are true friends.

We think of your command to care for each other,
sacrificial care that asks of each one of us,
and how that care can manifest itself,
and who it can link us to,
and how far those links can stretch.

As we begin Christian Aid week,
we pray for global friendships and the learning
experiences they offer;

we remember friendship can grow from difference,
and can be created, nurtured and sustained
in new and challenging ways.

Jesus, Lord, Saviour and friend.

In a world where division and hate grow each day,
enable us to stand together to create an alternative world,
where kindness becomes the norm,
where friendship is abundant
where your love is both guide and goal.
Amen.

A blessing

May this day bring you challenge of witness,
May this night bring you refreshment of sleep,
May your friends bring you joy by their being,
May you know God's grace and peace in your heart.
Amen.