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 Trinity Lutheran Church of Las Cruces
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 Easter 6B

John 15:9-17

⁹As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. ¹⁰If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. ¹²"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. ¹⁶You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. ¹⁷I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

Does God Have Friends?

Today Jesus says to his disciples (John 15:15) "I don't call you servants anymore, I call you friends."

I think a big part of the reason I became a life-long disciple of Jesus (not a great disciple, but a disciple nevertheless!) is because when I was about four years old, Mrs. Hein was the Sunday School teacher at St. Mark Lutheran Church in Rockford Illinois and with a big smile she said to us kids: "Jesus will always be your friend."

Really? I liked that! And half a century (or so!) later... I still do!

I believe THIS church is a place where fifty some years from now, people of all ages will be able to say "Jesus is my life-long friend & I learned this from the people of Trinity Lutheran Church in Las Cruces, NM."

Today again, Jesus reminds us, "I call you *friends*."

I began doing research for this message by first reading the Bible ... and then doing a little crowd-sourcing research: What is a friend?

As I read aloud a few of the answers I found, I invite you to do two things: think about how these definitions of friendship apply to your friendships 2) think about how this might apply to us as a church ... with our friend Jesus.

1. Friends don't let you do stupid things... alone!

There are a couple different ways of understanding that! But for us it means even when we do stupid things, Jesus will never leave us alone in our mess.

Friends don't let you do stupid things... alone!

2. TRUE FRIENDSHIP – is walking into a person’s home and your wifi connects automatically!

So – honestly - when you walk into this house of God... does your spiritual wi-fi connect?) What can we do as a church to help open ourselves to the connection with Jesus here?

How about when you walk into the home Jesus makes with the poor, or the frail elderly in nursing homes, or the desert campers, or the refugees, or the imprisoned, or the abused, or the lonely? Do we get the automatic connection, clear, immediate, between the most vulnerable people, and God?

Because of Trinity church I had the opportunity to go see one of our church friends in the hospital outpatient recovery unit – a few minutes after I arrived, this person started singing Amazing Grace right there in front of Memorial Medical Center staff and other recovering patients and their visitors. It was wonderful – just an automatic spiritual wi-fi connection between all of us and God – a clear immediate, strong signal.

Because of Trinity Church, Wayne and I also had the pleasure of spending a little time in Cristo Rey Lutheran Church in El Paso two weeks ago, with Pastor Rosemary Sánchez-Guzmán. Cristo Rey Lutheran Church is showing friendship to refugees from Central America (these are people who thank God have their papers and have just been released by ICE (US Immigration & Customs Enforcement) – and Cristo Rey is showing friendship by giving a few days of food, shelter, human kindness and logistical help getting family members on buses so they can travel to be reunited with family members already in the US.

-- *TRUE FRIENDSHIP – is walking into a person’s home and your wifi connects automatically!* The Spirit is our wifi!

At Trinity , we are trying to be open to the spiritual connectivity with people with whom Jesus makes his home: homeless youth (thank you to all who are making donations to the shelter), refugees (thank you to all of you who are even thinking about getting more involved with refugee ministry), and also, always Jesus makes his home with the children, as we hope to develop more of a connectivity with the local schools right here on Elks Drive, how will God connect us, to grow Trinity’s joy in sharing in parents, teachers, and children’s lives? Please pray for Trinity’s connectivity with our neighbors in Las Cruces.

Here’s another one, not a definition but a comment about friendship:

3. I keep telling myself to stop talking to weirdos but then I wouldn’t have any friends left.

Jesus doesn’t mind being friends with weirdos. He’s willing be my friend, and to be even *your* friend, too.

4. I especially like this one: A friend is someone who laughs at your jokes even when they’re not so great; sympathizes with your problems even when they’re not so bad.

Sometimes we fail to give credit to God for having a great humongous sense of humor – he made orangutans, didn’t he? And us! He made us in all our absurdity.

And sometimes we treat Jesus as if we can only bring him the HUGE humongous problems we have. Well, we can do that, but we can also bring to God the countless small problems we have

At work we can do it – *Lord this is a logistical nightmare –*

with people we're having a hard time dealing with, we can do that: *Lord, I'm having a hard time loving this person right now... help me breath in your Spirit*

We can bring Jesus the everyday problems – *this bill is bigger than I thought it was going to be Lord, help me figure it out...*

A friend is someone who laughs at your jokes even when they're not so great; sympathizes with your problems when they're not so bad.

Jesus is that kind of friend.

5. A last crowd-sourced comment on friendship for now:

Occasionally, a true friend gives his paw not his hand...

ok that one doesn't really apply to Jesus, except when you remember, that God also created our furry friends...

People of God, when I saw today's appointed Bible text was on love AGAIN, I have to admit I complained a bit to my Friend in Heaven. I said, *really, you want me to talk about love your neighbor AGAIN, I just preached about this! People should remember!*

Then because of Trinity Lutheran Church, I had the chance to visit another one of our frail elderly church members this past week:

He asked if I'd ever heard the words of WC Fields, an actor who lived the unrestrained showbiz life, drinking a river of gin and hooking up with a boatload of women. WC Fields was not known as a religious man, but as death approached, the story goes, a friend was surprised to see him reading the Bible. *What 'cha doing?* The friend asked Fields.

"Looking for loopholes." Was the answer, *"Looking for loopholes"*

I think Jesus keeps talking about love, again, and again, and again, because when it comes to loving our neighbor, even the difficult one, there's just no loopholes.

When it comes to being a friend to those who are hurting or in need, there are no loopholes.

What is Jesus biggest, most important commandment?

1) to love God

2) to love one another:

John 15:12 "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you."

When we do premarital counseling with couples thinking about getting married, one of the questions Pastors often ask is, do your friends like her, like him?

Does your partner like *your* friends?

In healthy relationships, friends care about the people YOU care about.

Jesus cares completely, about your friends, your family, your tribe.

And now Jesus asks US to care about HIS friends, and family and tribe, even the folks we wouldn't naturally want to interact with.

Does God have Friends? YES

Already in the Old Testament, the Bible says "The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend." (Exodus 33:11)

Although today the world is connected electronically like never before, nothing beats time together in person; it's one of the reasons regular weekly worship is so important, to spend actual physical time with God and with each other.

Abraham is also called God's friend... and that friendship seems to have been cemented when they ate together – remember in the book of Genesis when Abraham and Sarah cooked for the angels, and then mysteriously, it turns out they had had dinner with God.

Family dinners are important for our human families and for the family of God.

Today in the New Testament, we are called God's friends. Jesus who has already loved *us*, has given his life for us, today he asks us just to love him back - him and his friends.

It seems to me, from reading the Bible, even God wants friends. And because of Jesus Christ, we get to be friends of God. And of each other. And of our neighbors, even the "weirdos" ... especially the weirdos among us, like you and like me.

¹²"This is my commandment," says Jesus – again! "*that you love one another as I have loved you....* ...¹⁴*You are my friends if you do what I command you.*"

No loopholes, no loopholes, thank God, no loopholes.

AMEN.