

“Soul Friendship” (Trinity Sunday)

John 15:9-17

Rev. Angie Song

June 4, 2023

Good morning, everyone. I'm thankful to be here at Richmond Presbyterian Church. Thank you to the hospitality committee who cares for the theological students. When I arrived at SAH and VST in January, I was given an envelope with a letter and gift card to welcome me to Vancouver and an invitation to visit RPC. In the midst of all the changes of stepping down from ministry, moving across the country and returning to studies - that meaningful gesture reassured me that God is truly preparing and leading the way.

POEM: A Quiet Life by Baron Wormser

*What a person desires in life
is a properly boiled egg.
This isn't as easy as it seems.*

*There must be gas and a stove,
the gas requires pipelines, mastodon drills,
banks that dispense the lozenge of capital.*

*There must be a pot, the product of mines
and furnaces and factories,
of dim early mornings and night-owl shifts,
of women in kerchiefs & men with sweat-soaked hair.*

*Then water, the stuff of clouds and skies
and God knows what causes it to happen.
There seems always too much or too little
of it and more pipelines, meters, pumping
stations, towers, tanks.*

*And salt — a miracle of the first order,
the ace in any argument for God.
Only God could have imagined from
nothingness the pang of salt.*

*Political peace too. It should be quiet
when one eats an egg. No political hoodlums
knocking down doors, no lieutenants who are
ticked off at their scheming girlfriends and
take it out on you, no dictators
posing as tribunes.*

*It should be quiet, so quiet you can hear
the chicken, a creature usually mocked as a type
of fool, a cluck chained to the chore of her body.
Listen, she is there, pecking at a bit of grain
that came from nowhere.*

Today is Trinity Sunday. When I realized it, my stomach knotted a little. How is anyone to intelligibly speak about the beautiful, mysterious, somewhat nebulous theology of how God the Father, Son and Spirit are three persons in one being?? The Church Fathers of fourth-century eastern Turkey eventually developed some highly sophisticated thinking on what the Christian church soon called the Trinity. It took three centuries of reflection on the Gospels to offer the best metaphor they could find. The Greek word they used was *perichoresis* or circle dance. How do we translate that into how we live our lives for Christ today in 2023?

There are many ways to understand the Trinity. But as this poem, *A Quiet Life* by Baron Wormser, reflects - everything in life is interconnected - everything, even that boiled egg you had this morning for breakfast took people, creatures and natural resources alike to make it happen. And this is one metaphor or aspect of the Trinity, the Triune God that we will focus on today – on the interrelated of our God and therefore our relatedness to each other particular.

What is a friend? What makes friendship unique from other types of relationships? Many of you gave great examples and key words during the time with young Christians. The Britannica Dictionary defines friendship as a state of enduring affection, esteem, intimacy, and trust between two people. Even Christian love is different from friendship because our love owed to all people, even our enemies. Friendship is reserved for a few with whom we have a reciprocal sharing of love that is based on the good. It is mutual, voluntary and we can find a companion in friendship.

Aelred of Rievaulx (1110-1167) was an English Cistercian monk and abbot of Rievaulx. He was most popularly known for his writing on spiritual friendship. His understanding of friendship

came from his theology. He noticed that nothing on earth is left alone by itself and God has linked everything together in certain community out of diversity. Science affirms what Aelred understood 900 years ago: the Trinitarian intuition that the foundational nature of reality is relational; everything is in relationship with everything. The second human was taken from the side of the first so that nature might teach that all are equals, which is the appropriate mark of friendship.

God purposed us for fellowship and to flourish in the very high form of friendship. The fall of humanity in Genesis 3 is when superiority and inferiority are introduced into world. There is enmity, hostility, animosity, friction, dissension, worship of things that are not God, conflict, sorrow and unfulfilled desire. Yet God's intention for us was and is friendship. Jesus comes to redeem the hostility between us and God, and me and others, us and creation.

Victor Lee Austin says, "*We just won't be able to be really human if we do not have real friends.*"

The one God is constituted by three ongoing relationships. Since we humans are created in the *imago Dei*, then we made to be relational too, founded upon our relationships with God and one another. In a time and place where individualism, isolation, and loneliness dominates, we are shown through the Trinity, the Triune God that relationships aren't just something we "do". Relationships are who we are.

And we can best see this in the person of Jesus – the perfect model of friendship. John 15:9-17 is Jesus' farewell discourse and possibly the greatest passage of friendship.

Here we see Jesus' last words for his disciples the night before he goes to cross, all sitting at the last supper. In 14:18, Jesus says he's leaving but also assures his disciples of his return and that he would not leave them desolate. We learned last week at Pentecost the church was given an Advocate, the Holy Spirit who will strengthen their witness and keep them from falling away.

15:9a "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you.

Can you imagine what God must be thinking when he looks at Jesus? Jesus does everything perfectly – he obeys, loves, laughs, heals, proclaims, cries. But more than doing anything, I just love him because he's my child. God affirms this at Jesus' baptism – I am pleased with my Son! Now can you imagine being in Jesus' place and receiving that exact same love from Jesus? This is how much we're loved.

15:9b Now remain in my love. 10 If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. 11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.

Stay in that love that Jesus has for you by obeying his commands. Jesus didn't tell us this for my benefit or God's benefit, but for our benefit. Jesus knew that this world would hate, beat, tear us down because it did the same to him. So the disciples are to step into a relationship of love with both Jesus and the Father, out of which a transformed life, a fruit-bearing life, will flow. And that fruit is Jesus' joy in us – the complete, whole joy that can come from nowhere else.

15:12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.

So the greatest command Jesus gives to his disciples is for us to be a good friend! A good friend sacrifices themselves, gives themselves up for the other, not only with their biological life, but the small everyday/average things that make up your life for the good and life of the other.

15:14 You are my friends if you do what I command. 15 I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

And this is the real climax of this passage. Jesus is asking us to be a good friend because he is our Good Friend and has given us his love. So that we can pour that love out to others. A master-servant relationship is a transactional relationship. It is necessary and important, but not a friendship. Though we may seek to love Jesus for our own gain, Jesus loves us selflessly. Like Abraham and Moses who are called friends of God in the Old Testament, this title is unusual and speaks of the highest relationship possible between God and human.

15:16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.

This friendship is not our doing. Rather, Jesus chooses us as friends, which gives us tremendous security that his affection for us will not disappear. Where true friendship exists, true disclosure or revelation accompanies it.

15:17 This is my command: Love each other.

Victor Lee Austin, an Anglican priest and theologian, wrote *Friendship: The Heart of Being Human* where much of today's thoughts come from. He believes that friendship is a measure of success for humans. He quotes:

"Friendship is about something that lasts. You can lose your job, but that did not make you less human. You can lose your spouse, your bank account, your country, your digital identity,

your health. None of these losses need to diminish your humanity. Because through every transition of life, friendship is the heart of who you are. Friendship is why we exist in the first place. Friendship is also our final end in the kingdom of God. Out of friendship God has made us, for friendship he has died for us, to friendship he ever draws us." (xi)

Austin also believes friendship is unique because it is the only eternal relationship we will have. Not husband or wife for Jesus said that at the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage (Mat 22:30). Perhaps not even parent-child relationships will last for we will be brothers and sisters with them to our heavenly Father. What an incredible gift we have in friendship!



IMAGE: This icon is titled *The Trinity*, also known as *The Hospitality of Abraham* created by the Russian painter Andrei Rublev in the 15th century. *The Trinity* depicts the three angels who visited Abraham at the Oak of Mamre in Genesis 18:1–8, but the painting is full of symbolism and is interpreted as an image of the Holy Trinity. The Holy Trinity was the embodiment of spiritual unity, peace, harmony, mutual love and humility. Notice the triangle between the three persons of God – each of them are looking to the other and are complete in relationship to each other. But also notice at the bottom - the floor boards, their feet, even their fingers. If you follow the line, they seem to be directing themselves towards the one who is gazing at the image. Towards you, the beholder. It's as if the triangle below is incomplete unless the beholder is a part of the Trinity.

The space in front is open and we are invited. Will you pull up a seat?