

**Sermon – 6<sup>th</sup> Easter**  
**John 15:9-17 and Acts 10:34-48**  
**May 6, 2018**

**“Go and Make Friends...”**

A few weeks ago we talked about “*The Great Commission.*” Some of you may recall that I gave you a quiz at the beginning to see if you could identify what that commission was. Many of you raised your hand when of the four options given you recognized the Great Commission as Matthew 28:18-20 – “*Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit...*” As an aside I might add that a few of you who did not raise your hand when presented any of the options came up to me afterward and said you really knew the correct answer, but either didn’t want to give the answer away to the person seated next to you who you were quite sure didn’t know! Such modesty!

Yes, Jesus commissioned his church to “*make disciples and teach them.*” Like any religion Christianity propagates itself – that is, we seek to increase in number. A better way to explain our motives is, or I should hope would be that what we know and feel by knowing Jesus we want to share. However this impulse to share our faith is understood, what we seek is what our Lord Jesus sought – to make known the love of the God whom he called “Father.” That is why Jesus gave the command to make disciples. But I want to suggest to you today a profound and often missed aspect of what it means to be a disciple – and I propose to do so by way of two of our readings – Acts 10 and John 15.

I want to suggest that when we hear “*go and make disciples*” we immediately think preach, teach and baptize – those very vital activities of the church that we associate with the word “train.” No not those doggone mechanical monsters that snarl traffic in these parts when we’re late for some appointment, but “train” in the sense of enhance someone’s skills. To be sure, Jesus “trained” his disciples – he taught them all the time. So while it is true that a disciple is someone who learns – or ought to learn – how to live a Christian life, understanding and participating in God’s work in the world – John’s gospel includes a commission – a great one at that - which adds another meaning to the word disciple.

In John 15:14 Jesus said; “*I no longer call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing, but I have called you friends.*” Jesus said this after giving “*The Great Commission*” of John 15:12 – “*this is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.*” The Great Commission of Matthew 28 generates a job description. The Great Commission of John 15 creates a relationship. We need both. Pastor Richard Burrige of King’s College in London said of the contrast between discipleship and friendship “*Christians are so often busy being God’s servants, working for Jesus, that we forget he wants us to be his friends, to love him and be loved by him.*”

Christianity has a purpose – to be the provisional rule of God in the world until our Lord returns in glory. Serving is our calling. But Christianity is, or should first and foremost be a personal relationship, as John 15:13-15 says. Before we adjourn the season of Easter and celebrate Pentecost and all the feverish, “discipling” activity of the followers of Jesus that ensued, we do well to recall that Jesus wants to be your friend – no, has already called you his friend.

Why is this so significant for us? Just the other night my daughter Ingrid was discussing with me an English paper she is writing, really on the subject of social media but also on her generation and the state of friendship in it. One of her sources is a study by the Cigna Insurance Company subtitled “*death by isolation.*” It was astonishing to discover how many Americans of all ages say they feel lonely - 46% say that. 43 % say the relationships they do have are not meaningful, and while I know that phrase “meaningful” can have a lot of meanings, it’s still disquieting to learn so many people say that. I’m not sure I would. But one statistic was the most astonishing – only 18% of respondents say they have people they can talk to - and from that I deduce at the level of friendship. How startling. And how sad if true.

In Acts 10, Peter went to the home of Roman official named Cornelius, and we have the culmination of his visit in our lesson from Acts. Cornelius, we are told earlier in Acts 10 was a godly man, who prayed regularly and did good works. Peter, told to go and visit him by a vision, was very reluctant precisely because he was a Roman – an enemy of the Jewish people both at the level of governance and because they were “pagans” – Jews simply didn’t associate with them. But Peter goes, and he did the two things Matthew’s “Great Commission” says he should have done – he taught the people of Cornelius’s household and when they made their confession of faith, baptized them.

That’s what we do, right? We teach and baptize and thereby “make disciples.” But Peter did something else - often missed or dismissed in this story – he befriended Cornelius. God through the Holy Spirit had already “*made a disciple*” of Cornelius evidenced in the fact he was a man of prayer and charity. Peter made Cornelius what Jesus had made Peter - a “friend of God” and not incidentally or unimportantly, a friend of Peter. Acts 10:48 says, after Peter did all the official stuff - teaching and baptizing that is - Cornelius asked Peter to stay in his home for many days. There you have it, a Roman and a Jew with a lot to talk about. Religion makes adherents; Christianity - friends.

The study my daughter shared with me quoted a college professor from Indiana who said “*I have students who tell me they have 500 “friends” but when they’re in need, they have no one.*” My wife has this little hanging on her wall that says; “*a friend accepts us as we are yet helps us to be what we should.*” John 15 says you have Jesus, who chooses to call you his friend. You are so very much more than one who serves a living God, you are someone who that God truly loves.  
AMEN