

**Sept. 13, 2009**

**Only a Good Friend (BFF!)**

**John 15 : 9-15**

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I 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.

**Mark 8 : 27 - 38**

Jesus went on with his disciples to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do people say that I am?" And they answered him, "John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." He asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him, "You are the Messiah." And he sternly ordered them not to tell anyone about him. Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. He said all this quite openly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and looking at his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are setting your mind not on divine things but on human things." He

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called the crowd with his disciples, and said to them, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel, will save it. For what will it profit them to gain the whole world and forfeit their life? Indeed, what can they give in return for their life? Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.

Once upon a time there were two little boys. One was named Jimmy and the other was named Tommy. Jimmy suffered from a loss of oxygen when he was born. As a result he has cerebral palsy. He wears braces on his legs to keep them straight, and he walks using crutches. He has difficulty speaking, often stuttering and searching for words.

Tommy, on the other hand, had an uneventful birth. He learned to walk right on schedule and was an energetic, physically coordinated child. When he was four he began stumbling and falling. He slowed down. He began to have trouble doing things that he had done easily. His parents took him to the doctor.

The diagnosis was a form of muscular dystrophy that is degenerative. Tommy, his parents were told, would not live to grow up.

Tommy and Jimmy met at physical therapy. Jimmy was working on making his legs stronger. Tommy was working on staying strong as long as he could. They became best friends and spent all of their time together when they weren't at school.

When Tommy became so weak that Jimmy's parents felt that the time had come to tell him that Tommy wouldn't make it, Jimmy said, "NO! We are Best Friends Forever! He's not gonna die!" and ran into his room and shut the door, hard.

"NO! He can't die! It's not gonna happen!"

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But he did. Jimmy had a hard time of it. His parents held him and consoled him and told him there was nothing anyone could have done for his friend. But they couldn't make it better. They could only love him and be with him.

In our scripture from Mark today, we heard a key incident in the lives of Peter and Jesus. First, Jesus asks the disciples what people were saying about him, and the answer was that people thought that Jesus was someone come back from the dead, either Elijah or John the Baptist or one of the prophets.

It was evident to people who had heard Jesus speak, who had seen and experienced the miracles, that he had been sent by God. They believed that he was probably the forerunner of the Messiah that they were expecting, that he had come to prepare the way for the Messiah that they were praying for, who would free them from the oppression of the Romans.

Having gotten the answer about the general public, Jesus then asked his disciples, his 12 closest friends, who they thought he was. Peter, the one who often acted on impulse, answered. He got it! Jesus **wasn't** someone sent to prepare the people FOR the Messiah!

He WAS the Messiah! The son of the living God!

The one the people had been waiting for, praying for.

The one who would kick Rome out of Israel! The one who would re-establish the kingdom of the great king David. The one who would restore the country to independence and freedom!

And then immediately after this conversation, Jesus predicted his own death. And Peter, with hopes raised high that Jesus would be the one who would restore Israel, reacted, once again, on impulse-----“NO! That won't happen! You won't die! You can't!”

Fear spoke through him! The very human emotion of fear.

The Messiah can't die! The Messiah must live to sit on David's throne!

But wait! The insight that Jesus was the Messiah was new to Peter. If he had really had time to understand what it meant, I don't think he would've dared to speak that way. Would a simple fisherman dare to correct, dare to contradict! the Messiah, the king, the Son of God?

Peter had been all over the countryside with Jesus.

So had the rest of the disciples, but Peter was different. Peter was outspoken, daring, impulsive but powerful. He had just proven it by saying out loud what he was thinking, that Jesus was the Messiah!

Peter and Jesus were friends, close friends. Maybe even best friends. Maybe even like Tommy and Jimmy, BFF---best friends forever!

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So Peter's reaction, more than coming from a place of shock that the **Messiah** was saying he would be killed, was probably just like Jimmy's reaction----NO! My Best Friend is NOT going to die! It's just not going to happen! I need to have him around!

A gut reaction. An emotional reaction. So typical of Peter.

And just like a best friend, Jesus reacted right back, honestly, with emotion, saying words that only a good friend would ever forgive---

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"Get behind me, Satan!"

Strong words, from a strong emotion. Peter wasn't mincing any words and neither was Jesus!

But Jesus wasn't calling Peter Satan or saying that Peter was possessed by the devil. Jesus went on to say that Peter was stating thoughts that were human, not godly. And they weren't demonic words, either. Just purely human.

The word translated as Satan throughout the Old Testament, ha'satan, means something closer to the Enemy, the Adversary. Someone to be resisted, not necessarily someone with some kind of supernatural power or evil incarnate.

From his remarkable insight that Jesus was the Messiah, spoken by the power of the Holy Spirit, Peter had gone completely back to speaking from his human heart.

And why did Jesus rebuke him so strongly for just being human?

I think it was because Peter had said out loud exactly what Jesus was being tempted about. Jesus could have gone the other direction and not gone to Jerusalem. He could have left the area and just faded into obscurity.

In this passage, Jesus is referred to as the Son of Man. This title emphasizes the human nature of Jesus. It is one of the divine mysteries that Jesus was both fully God and fully human, and referring to him as the Son of Man is meant to remind the reader that he did not have any easy out from death because of his divine nature.

Instead, his human nature means that he entered into our lives fully, completely, without any special protection or comfort. God became incarnate to show us how much he loves us and wants to be with us in all of our human suffering. Jesus was fully human.

Because he was fully human, he was subject to the same temptations that we are. And one of those temptations is to avoid pain, to be afraid of death.

Jesus was not immune to his human condition, any more than we are. And Peter's words were his temptations, spoken out loud, all the harder to resist.

So when Jesus said, “Get behind me, Satan!” he was saying, “Don’t say it, Peter! It’s hard enough already! Don’t tempt me like that!”

Peter and Jesus were good friends, close enough to be honest and open with each other, and still forgive each other.

Despite his moments of weakness and lack of understanding, Peter was still the rock upon which Christ would build his church. Even with his flaws, he could still accomplish something great for the Kingdom of God.

And Peter still was willing to follow Christ even after being rebuked with such a strong word as “Satan.”

Best friends forever. Christ and the Church. The bridegroom and the bride.

In our passage from John this morning, we hear Christ's words that he no longer calls us servants, but friends. He was telling the disciples that they were more than learners, more than assistants. They were at a higher level than servants. Being a friend is much different than being a servant. A servant is paid for his help.

Friends help because they want to, because they love.

Servants are not privileged to know what the master is thinking, planning, feeling.

Friends are allowed to know each other's deepest thoughts and secrets.

Jesus said, "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."

Friends. This was good news for the disciples. They no longer had to wonder who Jesus was and what he was doing. They knew more about him, and through him they knew more about what God is like, and that God sent him because "God so loved the world."

This is our good news, too. Jesus Christ is our friend as well as our savior. Our friend, on our side, loving us, rebuking us when necessary, but forgiving us when we rebuke him or underestimate him or misunderstand him.

And he will be our friend forever, because we will live forever with him.

Jimmy never forgot Tommy. He continues to talk about him and remember everything they did together. He still refers to him as his Best Friend Forever even though they can no longer play and laugh and share secret jokes together. He still feels that Tommy loves him and he loves Tommy.

What Jimmy learned from Tommy will stay with him for the rest of his life, because what he learned was how important it is to have a best friend who spends time with you and who loves you more than life itself.

What Jimmy learned can be our lesson, too. There is nothing more important than knowing that Jesus Christ, the Son of Man and the Son of the living God, is our friend who is with us every moment of every day, our friend who loves us more than life itself.

Thanks be to God for the incredible gift of Jesus Christ, our friend forever.

Amen