

“You Have a Friend in Me”

In 1995, when my children were young, there was one video that was always on the television, and that was Toy Story. Disney was very creative when they brought to life, Buzz Lightyear, Woody and a whole gang of toys who go on journeys as friends. But they were also Andy's friends.

Toy story is well known for its song, “You've got a friend in me”. It goes like this:

*You've got a friend in me
When the road looks rough ahead
And you're miles and miles
From your nice warm bed
You just remember what your old pal said*

Boy, you've got a friend in me

*Yeah, you've got a friend in me
You've got a friend in me*

*You got troubles, I've got 'em too
There isn't anything I wouldn't do for you
We stick together and see it through
'Cause you've got a friend in me
You've got a friend in me.*

Our reading today was some of Jesus' final words of instruction to his disciples. What does he tell them? You've got a friend in me!

The next day, Jesus is going to hang on a cross and he wants to reassure them of his friendship.

Your final words in life are arguably your most important ones. You want to get to the point and speak words that people will remember.

What an emotional roller-coaster his closest friends are on this evening before he dies.

It begins with them crowded together in a small room and it's here that Jesus is going to share his heart with them. He is going to demonstrate his friendship.

At what cost to Jesus does this friendship come?

He begins in the most striking way possible. He goes around each of them and washes their feet. No one is excluded – even Judas the traitor is included, and we are told that Jesus knew who was going to betray him – all are invited to be friends, even those who would betray him and deny him.

Washing their feet tells them that they have a friend, who is willing to serve them, for that is why he has come.

He has come for this moment. However, his greatest act of service is not washing feet but dying on a cross.

Graham Kendrick gets it right in his beautiful hymn

*Oh, what a mystery
Meekness and majesty
Bow down and worship
For this is your God
This is your God*

In this little room, the shadow of cross has now fallen on Jesus, and he is about to face his final fate the next day, and he spends his final hours not wallowing in self-pity, not thinking about himself and saying *poor me*; but he spends it encouraging, cajoling, instructing, his disciples, whom he now calls friends.

Two things are happening here.

Firstly, God is demonstrating his amazing love to the world through Jesus. “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son that whoever believes shall not perish but have eternal life.” John 3v16

Jesus had told them earlier, “The reason the Father loves me is that I lay down my life – only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, I lay it down of my own accord.” John 10 v 17&18

Jesus chose to lay down his life, why?

He has come to rescue the world from sin. The first man, Adam, brought sin into the world, Jesus sent from God, is bringing redemption to the world.

Everything that we have done wrong, since the moment of birth to the moment that we die, is nailed to the cross with Jesus. That is why he is laying his life down and that is why we have communion today, we remember his sacrifice.

It's not because Jesus wanted to be a martyr, but because he knew that those who look to the cross and trust in Christ will be healed. Jesus calls them friends; "Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already." John 3 v18

So, like all friendships, we have a choice, whether we accept Jesus's friendship or we reject it, and Easter is a time when that choice becomes highlighted even more.

What does the cross mean to you?

I was invited along to our local AA group which meets in our North Hall. It's actually called the Cadder Group. The leader in charge has invited me those last few years to see what goes on. The North Hall was packed, I reckon that there were over a hundred AA members gathered. It was a guest evening and they came from other groups.

It was moving, listening to their stories. There were four speakers, all having a different story, and yet all sounding the same. Alcohol ripped their lives apart and AA has been their saviour. They speak of a higher power helping them in their lives.

Friends, as Christians, we can put a face to that Higher power. That face is Jesus, who understands our weaknesses, who knows what it is to be tempted, who in fact is God who emptied Himself and became a human being. Our Higher power is Jesus, who said that he is our friend and who walks with us.

Jesus tells them, "I no longer call you servant because the servant does not know what his Master is doing. I have called you friends because I have made known everything that I heard from my Father." Isn't that wonderful, we have Jesus as our friend, which means we have God as our friend.

Secondly, He is calling us to be friends with others.

At the AA meeting, what stood out for me was the connection that they all had with each other. The support given to each other was humbling. When one introduced themselves and acknowledged that they are alcoholic and then stated the time that they have been without alcohol, which varied, seven months, 40 years; you could feel the empathy swell up in the room. They spoke without a microphone and everyone listened intently – you could have heard a pin drop, even those right at the very back of the hall, listened with respect.

The feeling of friendship was strong because they are all on the same journey and all struggling with similar challenges and fears.

We as Christians, followers of Jesus, are also called to be friends – not just friends through a common cause, but friends who are committed to each other because we serve the same Lord, who calls us a friend; Jesus is our Friend, our Saviour, our Lord and he calls us to be friends with each other. When he finished washing and drying the disciple's feet, he said, "I have set you an example, that you should do as I have done for you."

As we prepare our hearts for communion with our friend and Lord, let us sing together the well-known hymn...

*What a friend we have in Jesus,
All our sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!
Oh, what peace we often forfeit,
Oh, what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer!*