

Sermon 09-28-2025
 Friendship and Reconciliation – Rev. Markus Wegenast
 John 21:15-17

¹⁵ When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.” ¹⁶ A second time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.” ¹⁷ He said to him the third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep.”

1)

“True Friends – biblical lessons about friendship.”

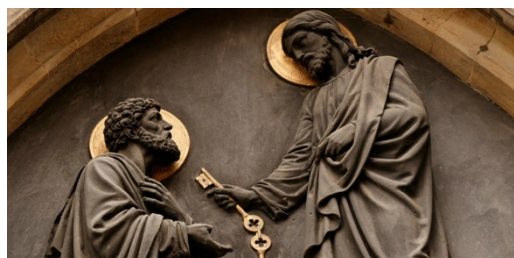
We started this message series back in August. Our first lesson focused on the unique friendship between God and a human – anyone remember? Abraham. We then focused more on friendships between people: We looked at Job and his friends in suffering, we looked at Ruth and Naomi and what they can teach us about commitment in friendship. We saw how Jesus, Nathanael and Philip dealt with obstacles in their friendship. We dissected the intricate friendship of Jesus with Martha, Mary and their brother Lazarus and saw how they went through thick and thin. Last Sunday we looked at Peter and Paul and how they clashed.

In all these friendships, in all the lessons they taught us, we could see that our friendship with God is foundational for any true friendship.

God is the creator of us all and he created us *for* each other – not against each other. That is true for all people, regardless of their faith or lack thereof. To me as a Christian, however, the Bible is foundational. I want to know what God’s word is telling us about friendship and I hope you have found our explorations meaningful.

When we started this series 6 weeks ago and looked at the friendship between God and Abraham – that was roughly in the year 1700 BC. We close our message series by jumping 1700 years into Abraham’s future and see how God is befriending people all over Israel. This time he does it in person, in the person of his son Jesus Christ.

Today, as we conclude our true friends message series, I want to look with you at a friendship that Jesus had with his chief disciple - the friendship between Jesus and Peter.



The friendship of Jesus and Peter

Scene of Jesus presenting Peter with the keys to the kingdom (Matthew 16:18f). It’s a picture from the St Peter Basilica in Vatican City

Peter was one of the first disciples Jesus called, and he soon became the lead disciple. Peter had many adventures in his friendship with Jesus. He was the first to identify Jesus as the Messiah; he was the one who accompanied Jesus up the mountain for the transfiguration (together with James and John); he was the one who felt he could walk on water just like Jesus and embarrassingly failed – and he was the one who boldly exclaimed never to abandon Jesus when Jesus announced his upcoming death – that didn't go so well either.

Today's reading from the Bible gives us one of the very last encounters that Peter has with his friend Jesus before he gets taken up into heaven on Ascension Day. It's a nice story, but it's also an uncomfortable story. It all happens a little over a week after Easter.

Jesus was raised from the dead on Easter Sunday and he appeared to all of his disciples. After that he meets them a few times more – some of these stories are recorded in scripture, some not, it just says that Jesus met his disciples several times after Easter before his ascension (20:30).

At some point the disciples travel back to Galilee where Jesus would soon commission them. While they wait for Jesus, they go back to their old fishing business. I mean, what else were they supposed to do? They had to make a living and Peter as the leader may just have suggested – hey you guys, why don't we all work together in my dad's fishing business for a while until Jesus tells us what exactly to do now that he is no longer with us...

So that's what they do – they are out on the lake fishing. They aren't very successful, didn't catch a thing all night – fishing was commonly done at night. As the sun rises, they see a man on the shore. They don't recognize him first. But then they realize: It's Jesus, and he is preparing a grilled fish breakfast for them at the beach and invites them to join him.



Jesus making one last breakfast for his friends – John 21:12f

I love this story, Jesus preparing breakfast for his friends. They had gone through a lot with each other. Their earthly story is almost over, soon they would start a new chapter in their friendship with Jesus when he will go to heaven and they are staying behind in order to become founders of the largest movement the world has

ever seen – we call it the church. But before that all happens, Jesus makes breakfast for them!

I actually always get hungry when I read this story in the Bible. The idea of having Jesus grill up some fish and serve it with bread in the morning – I don't think I've ever had fish for breakfast – maybe that's why it's so intriguing to me.

2)

But now things turn from heartwarming and yummy to very intense. Jesus singles Peter out and asks him a very direct question:

“[Peter], do you love me more than these?” – John 21:15b

Woe, woe, woe – what kind of a question is that? Have you ever had a friend who asked you if you love or like her more than the other friends in your group? That doesn't sound healthy – where is Jesus going with this?

First of all – who do you think the ‘these’ are? I tell you what: Jesus is probably not referring to the other disciples. Jesus might be referring to the fish that they had just miraculously caught. If you read the preceding story that becomes much more evident because there is a big focus on the number of fish they had just caught – it even spells out the number of fish (153!).

So it's not that Jesus wants Peter to love him more than his other friends, Jesus wants Peter to make a decision: *Are you going to keep fishing in your dad's fishing business or are you actually going to take my call for you seriously and take those keys to the kingdom and become a fisher of men to build my church?* Does that make sense?

To Peter it made sense. Impulsive as he is, he responds right away: *Of course, Jesus, of course I love you more than my fishing profession, of course I love you more than these, you know this!*

Jesus believes Peter and says: **“Feed my lambs.”**

The story could have ended here. Happy end, Peter accepts Jesus' call into ministry, he said yes Lord, I love you, let's go and build that church organization. Jesus is satisfied and uses yet another metaphor and says: Okay then, feed my lambs – aka, make Christian disciples, help them to grow in faith, feed them spiritually...

But that's not how the story goes.

What does Jesus do? Instead of being satisfied with Peter's answer he asks him again: “Peter, do you love me?”

Hm, that's odd, Peter must think. Didn't I just answer Jesus' question? Yes, Jesus, yes of course I love you, you know that I love you. Jesus says again: then, feed my lambs.

Ok, that was a bit awkward, Peter must think, did Jesus not hear me right the first time he asked. But now it gets even more awkward because Jesus asks again: Peter, do you love me?

Yikes! Peter must think. What's that all about?

Three times Jesus asks Peter whether he loved him. Three times Peter answers with a solid yes but you can tell that by the third time Peter gets a little upset:

"Peter felt hurt because Jesus said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?'" – John 21:17

There is something we need to be aware of to understand what's going on here:

Peter and Jesus did not have a chance yet to process what happened between them recently. Just a few days earlier, before Jesus was arrested, Peter boldly proclaimed that he'd never leave Jesus and always stand by his side. Well, we know this is not how things went down. What happened?

Peter denied Jesus the night of his arrest – not just once, not just twice, how many times? Three times!

Do you get a sense why Jesus asked Peter three times if he loved him during their last breakfast?

By asking him three times Jesus worked out redemption for Peter

Jesus is not rubbing into Peter's face that he abandoned him three times. Jesus is not judgmentally putting Peter on the spot in a sneaky passive aggressive way, embarrassing him in front of his friends, saying:

Okay now, you denied me three times, I'm getting back at you in front of everybody...

That's not what Jesus did. Jesus loves Peter enough to name the elephant in the room/on the beach. That's what friends do! They are not afraid to say something that may hurt if it tackles an elephant in the room that is affecting a friendship.

Peter has not forgotten that he denied Jesus the night before his crucifixion. The Bible says that Peter wept bitterly (Mt 26:75), so of course this is still on his mind. But he has not had the chance or the guts yet to approach Jesus about it. So Jesus does it for him. A good friend will not avoid addressing issues in a relationship. Jesus had to address this unresolved issue because it would have forever kept Peter from becoming the leader he ultimately became. It was an act of true friendship!

As a good friend, Jesus holds Peter accountable for unconfessed sins of the past, and as a result Peter is set free to follow Jesus.

Have you been held accountable by a friend? How did **you** react? It takes guts to not walk away. And it takes time. Jesus knew that; he could have asked Peter just once – but he needed to make sure Peter really hears him and that was not a quick fix. In this awkward triple-question Jesus asked was an act of redemption going on.

3)

“Redemption” - that is the very last aspect in our true friends message series I want to address.

Friends this is what Jesus does – he redeems. This is what Easter was about – it was not just an act of God giving a happy ending to the brutal death of his son – God worked out redemption through Jesus’ sacrificial death on the cross. Jesus is our redeemer – he is not too shy to address the mistakes **we** have made so he can set us free just as he set Peter free. When Jesus died for your sins on the cross, he reconciled us back into the arms of God so we can be true friends of God.

A few weeks ago, we looked at a super harsh Bible passage from the book of Romans together. It is such a provocative Bible passage and yet it builds the whole foundation for the miracle that God offering us friendship:

For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more surely, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life. - Romans 5:10

We have such a friend in Jesus that he is not willing to let us live on in animosity with our heavenly father – he is the redeemer that establishes our relationship with God.

Nothing is allowed to stand between God’s open arms and your life – God wants you and in Jesus, he proofed it to you. Have you accepted God’s friendship offer? Can you sing boldly and with conviction “I am a friend of God” or “What a friend I have in Jesus”?

Being God’s friend is for a purpose; God invites you to be his friend for a purpose. It was true for Peter, and it is true for you. What was the purpose that Jesus gave Peter when he asked him three times whether he loved him? Do you remember?

The purpose of a redeeming friendship with the Lord: “Feed my lambs”!

Jesus wanted Peter to feed his lambs and Peter would do this for the rest of his life. He made disciples and helped them to grow.

What about you? Are you accepting God's friendship offer for a purpose? Redemption is not just something that is supposed to make us feel better and happy – it is supposed to send us on a mission.

Do you feel that God is sending you on a mission? Do you feel you are called to be a leader in God's church too? I don't mean that you have to be a leader like Peter who became a pillar of the church, but all Christians, all followers of Jesus are called to lead a life with a purpose that our friend Jesus is giving us.

Feed my lambs, Jesus said to Peter. We all need to eat spiritually. If we don't eat as part of our friendship with the Lord, we starve. Do you have the hunger to be fed and to keep growing?

Today I want to thank you for all that you do in your personal friendship with the Lord. Thank you for helping people get fed.

- Wesley chapel
- Matthew 25
- Teaching/leading SOS, s.g. or youth
- Last Sunday UWF
- Stephen Ministry
- Helping your kids get to know Jesus

You do a lot to express your true friendship with the Lord. Don't give up, don't get discouraged, keep your friendship with the Lord alive and it will affect all areas in your life and the life of many others. Let us pray...