

There's a new TV show called “God Friend Me” coming out this Fall; a modern take on this word from Jesus.

I've read that it's about a thirty-something young man who is an atheist but receives a Facebook friend request from God, or at least someone with an account named God.

He then begins to receive recommendations for friends from God, and that creates the storyline for each show: how he interacts with this God-suggested friend.

But let us go back to the original story. I think there's more here than thirty minutes of entertainment.

Jesus is with his disciples around the table at his last supper with them. He has washed their feet, broken bread and served wine, and in John's account of that night, he is talking with them about many things: The Holy Spirit, peace, going to prepare a place for them, and so much for them to take in.

For most of the time they spent together, Jesus had taught and acted and modeled the way he expected them to think and act.

In that sense, they were apprentice-servants under his guidance.

Now they are being taken to a new, deeper level of relationship as Jesus calls them his friends.

Jesus says, “Everyone will know you are my friend if you love one another.”

It's so important to hear what he's not saying: he doesn't say, “I've got a dress code and a worship code and a doctrine code and a music

code and a prayer code and a building code and a certain kind of people code for you to follow if you want to be my friend.”

What he does say, and we can't hear it enough, he simply says, “You are my friends if you love one another.”

“You are my friends if you love one another.”

Forgive me if I've told this story before, but friendship has everything to do with how I came to be a Presbyterian.

My Grandmother Lancaster grew up out in the country in Louisiana and attended a certain church of a certain denomination, not Presbyterian.

When she got married in 1924 and moved to town, the ladies of the city church in the denomination in which she had grown up would not visit her.

Her new husband, my grandfather, had once owned a pool hall!

The Presbyterian women however, did visit.

I am Presbyterian because my grandmother experienced the grace and acceptance and friendship of Jesus through those ladies: a mysterious joy of having people show they love you even when you see yourself as unlovable and unwelcome.

Friends do that for you, don't they? Love you no matter what.

I think of Bruno Mars' song, “Count on Me”:  
*“If you ever find yourself stuck in the middle of the sea, I'll sail the world to find you  
If you ever find yourself lost in the dark and you can't see, I'll be the light to guide you  
Find out what we're made of  
When we are called to help our friends in need.”*

But Jesus doesn't stop at just saying ‘you are my friend; love one another.’ What Jesus is saying here about friendship goes way beyond that.

Jesus says to his disciples, “You did not choose me,” he says, “but I chose you.”

Joseph Parker, a great preacher of a past generation once said that he was not as baffled by the fact that Jesus chose Judas to be one of his disciples as he was by the fact that Jesus had chosen Joseph Parker to be his friend!

Let that sit with you: Jesus chooses you and me; yes, it is a baffling thought!

Aristotle’s famous assertion on the subject of friends comes to mind.

He said that since true friendship can only occur between equals, it is impossible to be on friendly terms with God.

But, with utmost respect for the great philosopher and much more than a Facebook request, on this side of the incarnation of God’s love in Jesus, when the disciples heard Jesus call them friends, the word for ‘friend’ that came to mind looked like this:

In the courts of the emperor or king, there was always a group of people known as the ‘friends of the emperor’, ‘friends of the king.’

They had ready access to the king. In fact, William Barclay says they even had the right to come to the king’s bedroom first thing in the morning, before he ever got out of bed!

So, when Jesus tells his disciples that they are his friends, he has moved them from being simply students sitting at his feet, to a very personal, anytime, anywhere, for any reason, relationship.

Since God, who is by nature divine, chose to become a human being in Jesus, friendship with Jesus is, therefore, different from any other kind of friendship because it issues from friendship with God’s son, a most certainly unequal relationship.

The miracle is that, by God’s grace, the friends of Christ can become what Jesus is by his very nature.

When Jesus says to his disciples, “Everything I have learned from my Father I have made known to you,” he is certainly not talking about a mere sharing of information.

He is talking about a relationship, a shared intimacy, a sharing of God’s passion and heart for the world.

What Jesus says is that friendship with him is to experience our own connectedness with all of life and the mystery of something greater than we comprehend.

As Eugene Peterson translates our text from Colossians: We look at Jesus and see the God who cannot be seen. We look at him and see God’s original purpose in everything created. For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible...”

In Jesus Christ, we have the wonderful gift of God’s friendship and have been drawn into a friendship that’s deeper than anything we know in this world of superficial friendships that have no responsibilities and no real commitments.

More than Facebook could ever imagine, or any TV show could ever script, being “face-to-face” and heart-to-heart with God and others brings us into an intimate presence as a friend of Jesus.

As Henri Nouwen said, “In a world so torn apart by rivalry, hatred, and anger, we have the privileged vocation to be living signs of a love that can bridge all divisions and heal all wounds.”

This is why Jesus can say, “You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit, fruit that will last”

It’s easy to get distracted from how these words were given and when they were given and get caught up in the sweet invitation to be Jesus’ friends.

You know the old saying that “Everything goes better with sweet tea,” and that’s how we sometimes think about faith.

We sweeten the tough ideas that will cost us something if we live by them.

We live our faith as if it's all about us, and we what God has to do in our friendship together is to give us what we want, as Jesus said, when we ask in his name.

After all, God, you friended me in Jesus!

During a special family series in a Catholic church a note was found on one of the pews. It was obviously written in a child's hand, and the note read: *"Dear God, I really, really want a bicycle. Please send me a bicycle." Your friend, Timmy.*"

The next night a second note was found: *"Dear God, I'll do anything. I'll even be good! Please get me a bicycle." Your friend, Timmy.*"

And on the third night when the priest came into the church the Statue of the Blessed Virgin was missing. There was a note on the altar: *"Dear God, if you ever want to see your mother again, I'd better get that bicycle. Timmy."*

No, to be a friend of Jesus is not about you or me; to be a friend of Jesus is to be forever tied to the mission of God by service and sacrifice, to bear fruit that comes through the cross.

Remember the when and the where Jesus gave these words on friendship.

Let's be clear, when we ask in Jesus' name, because we have been chosen by Jesus, we are asking it of ourselves:

That we are concerned enough to carry to others our friendship, our experience of God's love in Jesus Christ:

That we really do want a world that works for everyone. We don't want children to go hungry or live in hopelessness.

We do want families to enjoy life together with joy and kindness and encouragement.

We don't want violence and war to plague the planet or torture and revenge and retribution to be instruments of government and leadership.

We do want trust and integrity, morality and compassion to be the distinguishing marks of our society.

Jesus chooses you and me for a friendship that brings to life what deeply matters to human beings: that underneath our fears and our disappointments, our pride and our prejudices, we want to love and be loved, and make a difference with our lives.

Our choice is all about the kind of friend we will be.

It's easy to sing the old gospel song, "What a Friend We Have in Jesus," but the question the world needs answered is, "What kind of friend does Jesus have in you and me?"

TO GOD BE THE GLORY.