

“You’ve Got a Friend in Thee”
Week 1 – The Jesus Mission
John 4:4-26

A Message adapted from Community Christian Church
The Woodside Church

March 9, 2014

I try to be a friend to everyone. That’s a good thing right? A pastor should be friendly. Well I must confess there was a time I was not a good friend. I was in first grade. This was the first time my new friend Chuck came over to my house. Normally friends play catch or climb trees. But for some reason I convinced Chuck to follow me into a dark hole. Behind my house there was a creek which led to a tunnel which carried the water hundreds of yards underground below a neighboring subdivision. Chuck and I followed some older boys to the opening at the far end where the water came out. In single file, with flashlights in hand, we plunged into the dark tunnel and began the trek back toward my neighborhood. Sloshing through the water I began to fear I’d made a big mistake. The older boys knew we were scared and they made the most of it. They pointed out graffiti which warned us to turn back. They told stories of dead bodies found down there. They said we took the wrong path and were now utterly lost. On and on we sloshed in darkness for what seemed like days, fearing we’d never breathe fresh air or see the light of day. If I ever got out of this I vowed I would never go through a tunnel again.

Just when I was about to abandon all hope, I saw my salvation: the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel. I raced toward it. Little did I know that my greatest fear was still to come. As I emerged from the darkness...there was my mother waiting for me.

Suddenly the tunnel was looking pretty sweet. How long would I have to hide in there before the storm blew over one, two, three years? To this day, I still get claustrophobic when I go through dark tunnels, tight spaces or pull the sheets over my head. It was a while before Chuck’s mom let him come over.

You have friends. If what I hear is true a lot of them are feeling anxious, stressed, depressed. They may even feel they are trapped in some kind of tunnel. Maybe they are in a relationship that’s confining, controlling or claustrophobic. Maybe what they see on the news or social media makes them feel the world is coming apart. Maybe it’s a job that’s taking them in a direction they didn’t expect or want. Maybe it’s a fear that’s making it hard for them to breathe. Maybe it’s an illness or addiction that feels like a long dark maze. Maybe it’s an unexpected event that looks like a dead end. They may even be afraid to come out into the light because they don’t know what’s waiting for them.

In times like these we all can use a friend. Now I assume you are not like me – you didn’t lead your friend into that darkness. But with God’s help, you can be the one to lead them out of the darkness into the Light. During Lent our message series is **Friends for God**. You may be surprised that the Almighty, Infinite, Immense God also wants to be your Intimate Friend. Over the last nine weeks we learned God is closer than you think and He desires a personal, loving relationship with you and everyone on the planet. He’s not just your Creator, Lord and Savior, He’s also your Friend. Abraham “was called God’s friend.” (James 2:23). Jesus was called “a friend of tax collectors and sinners” (Matthew 11:19). Even at the moment Judas betrayed Him, Jesus called him “Friend” (Matthew 26:50). Earlier that night, Jesus said to His disciples

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love each other. John 15:12-17

Jesus is the best kind of friend. Not a friend that leads you into a dark tunnel but a friend that joins you in the dark so He can lead you into the Light – even though He has to lay down His life to do it. There is no greater love, there is no greater friendship than that.

What is the fruit He wants His friends, you and I, to bear? He asks us to go and make friends for Him. Many today long to belong. Yet they find it hard to make friends. Many today are stuck in some kind of dark tunnel and don't know how to get out. Jesus asks you, His friends, to offer His friendship to others, to walk with them in their darkness, to point the way to His Light, to show them that outside is not a scolding, punishing parent but a Best Friend who is waiting with open arms. Over the next five weeks we'll show you that the best way to make Friends for God is by simply being friendly.

Let's begin with a story in which Jesus made a new and very unlikely friend.

Now he had to go through Samaria. Jacob's well was there, and Jesus, tired as he was from the journey, sat down by the well. It was about noon. When a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" (His disciples had gone into the town to buy food.) John 4:4-8

Jesus meets a Samaritan woman at a well. There are several barriers which should keep them far apart. He is a man, she's a woman and the culture says it's inappropriate for Him to talk to her. He's a Jew and she's a Samaritan – they hate each other more than Eagles and Dallas fans (if that's possible). He's a holy Rabbi, she's a woman with a reputation. That's why she comes to draw water at high noon – the hottest part of the day. Nobody goes to the well then...unless they are avoiding everyone. We soon learn she's been married 5 different times and the guy she lives with now is not her husband. She likely contributed something to all those break ups but it's also true that she's been used and tossed aside by men and the whole community. She is buried 6 deep down a long dark tunnel and nobody is reaching down to help her.

Until Jesus. He breaks through all the cultural, religious and ethnic obstacles and talks to her. He asks her for a drink. He treats with her with dignity; and He loves her! He reaches down the long dark well she is stuck in and lifts her up into the Light. He becomes her friend and changes her life. She is so overwhelmed by the love of Jesus, that this former outcast runs back to town to tell everyone how her new friend changed her life. The Bible says she left her water jar, went back into town, and told her neighbors, "Come, see a man who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" (John 4:29). Through her, they all become friends of God.

Jesus is on a mission to make friends for God. And if that is His mission, it's also ours. Jesus' friend making mission is made up of 3 life-changing, world-changing elements.

The first element is **REACH**. We need to reach people far from God. The Samaritan woman is far from God. She is definitely spiritual. She has spiritual questions; spiritual struggles and spiritual longings. We are all fundamentally spiritual beings. But she can't find her way back to God...and that is why Jesus reaches out to her.

She is a lot like a guy Pastor Dave Ferguson calls Jack. Jack was always a spiritually minded person. As a kid his parents took him to church. He's always had spiritual questions and spiritual longings. Sadly, as a kid, he was abused and rejected by those who should have loved him most. As a result, Jack started drinking...a lot. Doing drugs...a lot. Jack tried to escape his painful past of abuse and failure through drugs and alcohol. Yet it buried him in a dark tunnel. He became jobless, homeless and friendless.

Even though Jack considered himself spiritual, he found himself in a place that was very far from God. A few friends met Jack in his dark tunnel and got him started on his path to sobriety and God. Two years ago his search brought him to church and to a small group. Then Jack took a huge step on his spiritual journey and gave his life to Jesus. When asked why he did this he said, "This is to let people know I found my way back to God...and that I've found a mission for my life!" Jack, like the Samaritan woman, now makes friends for God.

Every day there are people like Jack and the Samaritan woman around me and you. Family, neighbors, coworkers, classmates who are walking through a dark tunnel, who are far from God and don't know how to find their way home to Him. Jesus wants us to reach them. Our mission is to reach them and help them find their Best Friend.

The second part of Jesus' friend-making mission is **RESTORE**: restoring God's dream in this world. From the very beginning God's dream and desire is for us to live in perfect relationship with Him and with each other. People in the Samaritan woman's life said they loved her, but only used her. God's dream for her life was shattered!

There are people like her near you. They are missing the life God dreamed for them. It may be due to their choices. It may be due to hurtful people who should have loved them. It may be both. It may be the homeless friends Hilary Walp told us about last week on Ash Wednesday. It might be the one who struggles with an addiction and has yet to hit bottom. It might be the single mom trying to raise kids on a poverty-level income or a refugee who is all alone and trying to make a home or the child who doesn't have access to a good education. Jesus wants to restore God's dream for their lives through us.

Third, Jesus wants us to **REPRODUCE** His mission in the lives of others. This is exactly what happens to the Samaritan woman at the end of the story. This woman who was far from God and her people is the very one who brings God and her people together. "Many of the Samaritans from that town believed in Jesus because of the woman's testimony" (John 4:39). She's no longer in a dark tunnel. Now her mission is to help her neighbors climb out of their dark tunnels into the Light.

Here at Woodside we want to reproduce Jesus' friend-making mission. That's why we ask every leader to train another leader. We want to reproduce more and more Growth Groups and microchurches. We want to reproduce more mission trips – local, national, international. We

want to reproduce more mission projects – prison ministry, recovery ministry, dinner ministry, Code Blue, Cast Your Cares, Urban Promise, Habitat for Humanity.

When you reach out to restore God's dream, take someone with you. Train at least one other person. If it's reaching out to kids or students – ask someone to help you! If it's volunteering for a local food bank – bring someone along with you! If you lead a Growth Group or Microchurch, ask someone to lead with you and help start a new one. If you have your own mission idea – do it, but don't do it alone! Don't keep it to yourself, reproduce it in others.

When we reach, restore and reproduce, we BLESS the world. That's Jesus' Friend-Making Mission. He had a simple way to fulfill His Friend-Making Mission. It's called B.L.E.S.S. How did Jesus make friends for God? He BLESSED them with 5 practices.

B = Begin with Prayer

L = Listen

E = Eat

S = Serve

S = Share

Each week during Lent we'll look at a step in this process. You'll learn that the easiest way to make friends for God is just by being friendly. This will not only change the lives of those around you, it will change your life as well.

That's what happened to one lady who became friends with a guy. They started dating. A few months went by and she noticed that every Sunday he would take his two children to Sunday school and attend services at Woodside. She was raised in a church but at the time, and for some time, she didn't practice her faith or attend worship. Yet she wondered why her boyfriend never asked her to join him at church. She never said anything about this. Then one day they were attending the Yardley Christmas parade on a Saturday with his mother. They started discussing their plans for the following Sunday and the guy said he was going to take his kids to church. His mother looked at the girlfriend and said, "Are you going to church with him?" She said, "I don't know-he hasn't asked me yet!" Mom said to her son, "Why haven't you invited her to church yet?" So, guilted into it by Mom, he invited her to join him at Woodside.

That one invitation changed her life and changed Woodside. The girlfriend was Sue Harris-Miller. When Harry finally invited her to Woodside she was genuinely shocked at how welcoming it felt from the moment she walked through the doors.

Everyone was so nice! I was greeted right away, and everyone was really warm and friendly! I did not expect it, but I loved how I felt there and actually wanted to go back. I have been coming ever since! That was in 2014. I was encouraged to explore a relationship with Jesus. It was at Woodside where I learned what that meant.

In addition to attending worship Sue and Harry joined a Growth Group. She grew closer to Jesus. Then, the month after she married Harry, Sue became our Director of Ministry and Mission. For the last five years she has overseen mission such as Code Blue, Dinner Ministry, TASK, Cast Your Cares, Urban Promise, Family Promise, Mission Trips and she organized and led Advent Night, Angel Tree, Feeding Hungry Heroes, the Habitat Parking Lot Build, 2 Seed Packings,

Meal Packing and all our Mission Partners near and far. She led us through the incredibly challenging time of Covid and beyond. Woodside's reputation as a caring, mission-focused faith community is largely due to Sue's leadership. All that started with an invitation from a friend.

Imagine what will happen when you invite your friends.