August 19, 2018

John 1:43-51

Make New Friends

Rev. Kerry Smith

Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

John 1:43-51 The Message

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. When he got there, he ran across Philip and said, “Come, follow me.” (Philip’s hometown was Bethsaida, the same as Andrew and Peter.) Philip went and found Nathanael and told him, “We’ve found the One Moses wrote of in the Law, the One preached by the prophets. It’s Jesus, Joseph’s son, the one from Nazareth!” Nathanael said, “Nazareth? You’ve got to be kidding.” But Philip said, “Come, see for yourself.” When Jesus saw him coming he said, “There’s a real Israelite, not a false bone in his body.” Nathanael said, “Where did you get that idea? You don’t know me.” Jesus answered, “One day, long before Philip called you here, I saw you under the fig tree.” Nathanael exclaimed, “Rabbi! You are the Son of God, the King of Israel!” Jesus said, “You’ve become a believer simply because I say I saw you one day sitting under the fig tree? You haven’t seen anything yet! Before this is over you’re going to see heaven open and God’s angels descending to the Son of Man and ascending again.”

I love beginnings. I love opportunities to start over. I love New Year’s resolutions and the beginning of the school year. I love the idea that I can begin again, I can be different, I can be better. One of my favorite scriptures is 2 Corinthians 5:17, “So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!” (NRSV)

One of the things about new beginnings is the opportunity to make new friends. There is a great verse in Proverbs about making friends. Proverbs 18:24 says, “There are persons for companionship, but then there are friends who are more loyal than family.” (CEB). The Message Bible translation, which is more of a paraphrase, puts that verse this way, “Friends come and friends go, but a true friend sticks by you like family.” It is hard when you start a new job or move into a new neighborhood or start a new school, and one of the things that makes it hard is making new friends. We worry that people won’t like us or that we won’t fit in.

This week I listened to a podcast called StartUp about a pastor starting a new church. Reporter Eric Mennel tells the story of this new church while also reflecting on his own relationship with God. He shared a story about going to the beach. There were some stone jetties that shot out from the shore into the ocean and the rip current was particularly strong that day. As Eric was reading his magazine on the shore, he heard screams. There were two little boys, maybe ten years old, stuck on the jetties and the waves were slamming them into the rocks. People started running to the water, towards the kids. Eric used to be a lifeguard so he took off. He dove head first into the water and bee-lined for the kids. It took about a minute to get there, and as he did, a couple of other people had already made it. They were pulling the kids out and they were going to be okay. Eric turned around to swim back to shore but after about thirty seconds of swimming, he realized he wasn’t getting any closer. He was stuck in the rip current now.

He looked to the right and there was a woman with a boogie board who looked to be in the same situation. They made eye contact and she thrust the boogie board towards him. Eric grabbed it and they both held onto it and tried to push towards shore, but they weren’t making any progress. And now the waves were pushing them towards the rocks. Large waves, a few feet high. One wave would come, and throw Eric and the woman under water. They would come up for air and immediately, another wave would hit. The boogie board snapped in half and they grabbed each other by the wrist. Eric had this thought, “Oh, this is how people die, like actually die.”

Then, out of nowhere a guy with leathery, tan skin, Captain Ron hair, and flippers on his feet swam up to them and grabbed the woman by her other wrist. Like a human tugboat, he pulled them out past the jetty where there was a sand bar, and for the first time Eric and the woman were able to stand on their own two feet. They walked around the jetty and they were able to ride the current back into shore. When Eric got home that night, he cried for a while, not because he was afraid of dying, but because he hadn’t felt so taken care of in such a long time. For the briefest moment, he surrendered because he had no other choice but to trust that guy. The fact that he was only capable of doing that when his life literally depended on it made him so sad.[[1]](#footnote-1)

We need each other. There is a great song called “I Need You to Survive.” “I need you, you need me. We're all a part of God's body. Stand with me. Agree with me. We're all a part of God's body. You are important to me. I need you to survive. I pray for you. You pray for me. I love you. I need you to survive. I won't harm you with words from my mouth. I love you. I need you to survive.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

In the Bible there are so many stories of unlikely friendships that changed the world. Stories about Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8), Jonathan and David where it says “the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David and Jonathan loved him as his own soul” (1 Samuel 18:1), and Ruth and Naomi where Ruth tells Naomi, “Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God.” (Ruth 1:16). They are stories of loyalty and commitment. Stories about people who support each other. Stories about people who stayed together through thick and thin. It is like that Girl Scout song, “Make new friends but keep the old. One is silver and the other is gold. A circle is round; it has no end. That's how long, I will be your friend.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

Colossians 3:12-14 is a good reminder about how to be in relationship with one another: “As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.”

Here is the thing, if you want to make new friends, you have to be a friend to others. Everyone in our world is a beloved child of God. So, we treat people accordingly. We listen more and talk less. Have you ever been busy doing something other than listening, and a young child takes your face and turns it towards them to get your attention? That has happened to me, more than once, and I am thankful. I need a reminder to listen.

I need a reminder to sit with those who are sitting alone. I need a reminder to be kind and to offer help. I need a reminder to be a friend to the lonely and to encourage others. I want to think about other people. I want to share and to look for the good. I want to be the change in the world that I want to see.

I want to share with you the account in John’s Gospel of Jesus calling the disciples. John the Baptist had said that Jesus is the lamb of God, and John tells his followers to go follow Jesus. Andrew does and brings along his brother Peter. Jesus then goes to Galilee and finds Philip and says follow me. Philip tells Nathaniel to follow Jesus. So far the followers of Jesus have been eager, but Nathaniel is skeptical. READ SCRIPTURE.

Every time the invitation is offered with kindness and with love, come and see what God is doing in and through Jesus and the community of disciples who have chosen to follow him.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Making new friends is about being yourself, being open and honest about what matters to you. It means sharing with people about your church. That’s why we give the backpack blessing tags. We want to share about the joy that we find in this place with others. It is about an invitation. Come and see what God is doing.

 As Nathaniel comes to Jesus, Jesus describes him, “There’s a real Israelite, not a false bone in his body” (1:47). Nathaniel doesn’t know who Jesus is, and he tells him, “You don’t know me.” Nathaniel is so moved by Jesus’ knowledge of him that he makes a confession of faith. “Rabbi! You are the Son of God, the King of Israel.” And Jesus tells Nathaniel that he hasn’t seen anything yet. Jesus always recognizes us first. Jesus always sees the good in us, what we are capable of. Jesus recognizes God in us. Later in John’s Gospel Jesus will say, “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me.” (John 10:14-16). Over and over again in John’s Gospel people are focused on their problems, whether it is Nicodemus worried about how he can be born again, or the woman at the well focused on her relationships, or the man by the pool who can’t get to the healing pool on his own. Jesus is having conversations with these people and they don’t recognize him. They are so focused on their own self, that they don’t reach out to see the friend who is in front of them. They don’t see Jesus right in front of them.

 We need affirmation and warmth and encouragement. I heard a parenting expert this week say, “Every child needs at least one adult who is irrationally positive about them.”[[5]](#footnote-5) We can bring new life to any relationship if we can bring affirmation, warmth, and encouragement. Last night I squirted toothpaste onto this plate. Is there any way for me to put all this toothpaste back in the tube? I can’t. Our words and our actions are the same way. Our words and our actions have the power of life or death. We can use our words and actions to hurt, demean, slander, and wound others. Or we can heal, encourage, inspire and love others. We will make the wrong choice, and our words and actions will hurt others. We can’t put them back. We must make the choice every day if we are going to give life to others or not. May we be known for our gentleness and our compassion. May we give life to a world that desperately needs it. We will never regret choosing kindness. Amen.

1. https://www.gimletmedia.com/startup/church-planting-5-the-retreat [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zVXKx74J0yk [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://www.scoutsongs.com/lyrics/makenewfriends.html> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. http://www.davidlose.net/2015/01/epiphany-2-b/ [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. http://jenhatmaker.com/episode-02-jim-burns [↑](#footnote-ref-5)