

What a Friend We Have in Jesus

John 15:9-17

Happy Mother's Day! Who here had a mother, or has a mother? Happy Mother's Day! Who here is a mother! Happy Mom's Day. Who here is not a mother but has nurtured someone when they needed it? Happy Mom's Day to you. Some of us may have been raised by someone other than our natural mother. Anyone here in that category? Happy Mother's Day! Mother's Day was first celebrated in 1914 when Anna Jarvis established a holiday to honor her mother, who was a peace activist during the Civil War. Anna was soon horrified at the commercialization of the holiday, and tried to eliminate the holiday. Now, Mother's Day is one of the biggest holidays for flowers and candy and phone calls as we remember mothers and motherhood and those who nurtured us in our lives. Although Mother's Day is not a church holiday, we honor those here who nurtured and loved us.

And our passage today talks about love and nurture, where Jesus continues his last speech to the disciples about abiding in him. Today, Jesus adds another level to our discussion. Last week Jesus said that he **lives** in us and we **live** in him. Today, Jesus says as Christ-followers that we live in **love**, and love lives in **us**.

Love is a pretty good message for Mother's Day, so let us pray together, "Dear mothering God, we thank you for the nurture of your eternal love, and we thank you for those who have loved us, even when we were being ornery little kids—teaching us that human love at its best is unconditional and without end. Amen."

One thing about the Gospel of John—it is longwinded. I like John, don't get me wrong, but the Gospel can sometimes say the same thing over and over and over. This is one of those times, so we need to carefully look at what is being said to see the small changes that are being made in the text, and then think about what those small changes mean to us. Again, like last week, Jesus says that we are to abide in Jesus' love. But now Jesus goes another step in our story by saying, "If we keep Jesus' commandment, we **will** abide in Jesus' love." And then Jesus takes another very small step, but it really is a huge jump. Jesus says, "And **this** is my commandment, that you **love one another** as I have loved you." Now when you think a moment about this it seems Jesus is just saying over again, "All you need is love." But if we keep Jesus' commandment to love one another, then we **will** abide in Jesus' love. Then Jesus goes another small step and says we are Jesus' **friends** if we love one another. Our passage says we are no longer servants, but **friends**. So, we go in our passage from (1) **living** in Jesus to (2) **loving** in Jesus to being a (3) **friend** of Jesus. What do these subtle changes mean? Does being a friend go beyond love?

Whenever scripture leads me to a question like this, I always go back to the original language of the text to see if there are some hidden meanings in the original words. In fact, that is the case here. The word translated servant is actually *doulos*, the Greek word for slave. So Jesus actually said, "You are my **friends** if you do what I command you. I do not call you **slaves** any longer because the slave does not know what the master is doing, but I have called you **friends** because I have told you everything."

In this final discourse to the disciples, Jesus says that they are no longer **slaves**, but now are **friends**. Slaves are under the law and must do what they are

told. Friends are freely united in love, and act not by being forced in law, but act out free compassion, knowledge, faith and love. Slaves have no personal relationship. Friends, on the other hand, are united in mutual relationship! Jesus has just changed everything. We are no longer slaves to the old law, but are now related to Jesus as loving **friends**. Friends act in friendship and love. Friends act in the best interest of each other—the relationship is now the primary goal!

Now I want you to think for just a moment about this seemingly small change in words that signals a huge change in our faith lives. Jesus says the basic rule of the universe is love, and now we are friends with the creator of the universe. Earthly power is not the secret to the universe! Military might is not the secret! Money, fame and fortune are not the secrets of the universe. All these things we can see and touch and use as weapons to hurt one another are **not** the keys to the universe.

Love is. Love is the key. Love transforms slavery into friendship. Love changes everything, because it is the ultimate power in the universe.

This is one reason why I get a little frustrated about Mother's Day. If you only honor your mother only on Mother's Day, then you are acting according to a rule or law. If you love your mom **everyday**, then you understand that love is the greatest power in the universe. But love is not limited to just mothers. Everyone can nurture others. Everyone can care deeply and passionately for others. Certainly, when Jesus' mother Mary looked up at Jesus on the cross, it was an expression of a mother's love, but Mary Magdalene also looked up to the cross in love and compassion and care. Both Mary's knew love and loss and what it meant to lose someone they loved so deeply. But what we learn from these two women is that we are **all** capable of unconditional motherly love. Both of these women knew they were in great danger by standing beneath the cross. But they also knew they needed to be there to show their love, to be present for Jesus during his suffering. These two Mary's were not slaves who had been commanded to be present, but they loved Jesus, and they were there of their own free will, in spite of the danger, as friends of Jesus. They understood that Jesus had been unjustly accused, tried and convicted. They knew Jesus had been sentenced unjustly to death by crucifixion. But out of deep friendship, they were there, standing for Jesus.

This type of unconditional eternal love is sacred. Not sacred as far as something we worship, but **sacred** because it is a part of who we are at the **deepest** level. Queen Keōpūolani is sacred this way. She is a part of the people of Maui, and she is a part of the people of Waiola. Her Christian faith is foundational to us as people of the land. Her faith is who we are. Her faith is our identity, our spirit, our body, our mind. This makes Keōpūolani sacred to us, as a founding mother, and as a founding Christian.

And this is the same thing Jesus taught about treating one another in love. We are part of each other. Just as Keōpūolani is a part of us, so each of us is a part of Waiola and the body of Christ. Each of us defines who we **all** are as a people, as a human race. There is no more kapu here: no one here is slave anymore, but we are now friends to one another, joined in eternal unconditional aloha. In aloha, we are mutual **friends** to everyone, living in love, following Jesus' commandment to love one another. In friendship bound in love, we are sacred to each other in pilialoha.

Is it easy to live this way? No. For those of you who are mothers, there were

certainly times you wanted to thump your kids, right? But love sees through those troubling times. Love is larger than the present problem. Love arcs from here to eternity, and jumps right over all the little pilikia of life, the maddening little things that drive us all pupule. Love lives in us when we live in Jesus. When we are angry and hurt, if we stop for a moment, and acknowledge Jesus living in us, then love conquers everything—not conquering through the power of anger and force, but overcoming the world through the power of **eternal aloha friendship**. Turn away from slavery to earthly power, Jesus commands us, and live in the freeing power of love. In love, you can slash the chains that bind you to earthly power, and become a friend of Jesus in sacred friendship, sacred pilialoha. Wow, what a friend we have in Jesus!