



Jesus Calls You Friends
A Sermon on John 15:9-17

May 6th, 2018 ~ 6th Sunday of Easter
First Federated Church of Peoria, Illinois
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Jeffrey Courter was one of those rare high school students who was able to move in and out of cliques. At lunch you'd see him eating with the athletes as they picked the granules of salt off their pretzel rods. Between classes you'd see him talk to the gamers about the newly released Black & White video game. After school you'd see him with the band getting ready for the Friday night football game. He made friends wherever he went and somehow cliques didn't constrain Jeffrey. He was a social circle anomaly, moving from one to the next.

In ancient Roman times, while Jesus was with the disciples, cliques were found throughout that whole area. That becomes obvious when you look at how the kings and queens would organize their kingdom. There were certain people who were allowed into the royal courts: statemen, military leaders, economic advisors, spiritual gurus, entertainers, and the occasional odd fellow too. Amongst all those people were the king's or queen's inner circle. This group of select people were known as "the friends of the king or the friends of the queen." This was an elite group of people who were given the privilege of meeting with the king or queen before anyone else. In fact, they could enter into the king's or queen's bedchamber earlier in the morning for some breakfast and a chat. The only way someone could become part of "the friends of the king or queen" clique was if the king or queen chose you to be a friend. Even if you had the right pedigree, said the right things, looked the part, and played the schmoozing game well enough, there was no guarantee you'd get in. The selection process was subjective and the way in was arbitrary. Your status was dependent how the king or queen felt that day.

If you did somehow get in to the inner circle of friends, that didn't mean you were going to stick around. On a whim the king could decide he didn't like you because of the way you looked, an unpopular opinion you accidentally let slip, or any other nonsensical reason, and poof, you were on the outside again. So those "friends" of the king were always plotting, navigating, and conniving ways to keep their status within the inner circle.

We all know that cliques still exist today. In schools, a person's social ranking can be based on which clique they are a part of. The youth group talks about cliques on a regular basis and how difficult that can make life. If you're not part of the right clique you're brushed off, overlooked, or ridiculed. As one youth group member put it, "cliques are bad because they just hurt people." Cliques not only exists in schools. They also exist in workplaces. There is an impromptu gathering in the break room, but one person isn't invited. Or a group of employees with go out for dinner and someone is intentionally left out. Worse yet, the boss has some favorites and they get all kinds of special treatment. Cliques also exist in neighborhoods. A dear friend of mine told me about how their family

isn't invited to the progressive dinner the neighborhood organizes. How their children aren't allowed to use certain swing sets. That family isn't part of the "in crowd." For whatever reason; they aren't accepted into the neighborhood inner circle. Unfortunately, cliques are also in churches. They are easy to see and their exclusivity can be devastating both to individual and the universal church. Cliques are all around.

When Jesus said to the disciples "You are my friends..." it would have been shocking to them. It would have been shocking because, during their lifetime, a person's social status was locked into place. They couldn't climb the social ladder. Their place was fixed by powers outside of their control. If they were born a noble, they'd always be part of an elite class. If they were born poor, they'd always be poor. If they were born a servant or slave, they'd always be one, but things are drastically different with Jesus.

In proclaiming the disciples to be friends, Jesus reformed the broken patterns of society. People are no longer bound to a fixed in their there standing. Those arbitrary cliques formed by people have been dismantled in Jesus. Someone who was born outside of those superficial little inner circles, and had no hope of getting in, are now suddenly included. Jesus dismisses societal cliques and says "you have value." Jesus, no matter what our standing is with other people, says "you're my friend."

The way Jesus turns society, and its cliques, on its head is a beautiful part of Christianity. Jesus doesn't conform to the world. Jesus transforms the world and everyone in it. Those, who, for so long found themselves standing on the outside are now included. They have become part of the Jesus' inclusive and expansive circle of friends. That is good news for everyone.

Although, being called a friend of Jesus comes with some significant ramifications. Jesus says in verse 12, we are to love one another. The love Jesus is talking about is more than being polite or saying kind things with a smile your face. The love Jesus is talking about is a sacrificial love. The type of love which seeks justice for the wronged. The type of love which brings peace to unrest. The type of love which unifies the divided.

Jeffrey wasn't confided to any one clique. He moved around, from one to the other, but he was still bound by them. King's had their cliques and ruled their kingdoms in that way. Jesus doesn't navigate cliques nor does he have them. Jesus transformed the way society functions and in Jesus there are not cliques. Jesus calls you a friend because of who he is not who you are. Being called "friend" by Jesus charges us to love one another with a sacrificial love. The type of love that seeks justice, peace, and unity.

Jesus calls you friend.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.