

John 15

'I have called you friends'

Amington Parish Church
Memorial Service

Saturday 23 November 2019
Annie Somers

Friend

I chose this passage for the service today, because it was the reading on the evening I took Annie what turned out to be her final communion.

It comes from a big section of John's gospel in which he relates Jesus' final prayer for his disciples – both present and future, including those of us today who call ourselves his followers. It contains some precious words – especially those in the verses we've heard this morning.

Different people have all sorts of different views about God. They range from things like 'there isn't one', to the classic 'old man with a beard', to 'God *is* / God is *in* everything', and all sorts of views in between.

Different Christians have different views about God as well – but if you want to know what Christians *should* think about God, if you want to know what's at the heart of Christian teaching about who God is, these words of Jesus are critical.

[Jesus said,] '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.'

John 15.15 (NIV)

'I know longer call you servants... Instead, I have called you friends.'

God is Almighty, all-powerful, all-knowing, all-present, the creator and sustainer of all things – and yet he calls Jesus' followers his *friends*.

Now I've never been particularly good at making friends. I've never really been one for having a 'best' friend – instead I have a small number of what I would describe as 'close' friends.

I wonder who your closest friend is – or has been? Many of us here counted Annie as our friend, some of us might even describe her as a 'close' friend – or maybe even a 'best' friend.

That closeness, being able to trust one another, being able to rely on one another, knowing what's going on in one another's lives, thinking the same things, maybe even wearing the same clothes – I remember when Jess and her friend Anna independently wore almost an identical outfit one day – that sort of closeness, is what Jesus is getting at here.

He is telling his disciples – which includes those of us today who follow him – that God is not distant. God is not some far-off being who is uninterested in our lives – or worse, malevolent. By some crazy truth – which Jesus calls 'love' – the creator of the universe has chosen to be 'friends' with some of his creatures.

It's like the CEO of a massive company being best mates with the person who cleans the toilets – except far greater, and far grander.

And far more beautiful.

Listener

Annie was our friend, but more than that, and much more importantly, she was *God's* friend. She knew Jesus, she prayed to him, she listened to him.

In fact, that's one thing I suspect I'll always remember about Annie: she *listened*. Every now and then Annie would beckon me over, or ask me to phone her, because she had something to tell me. I won't lie, there was always a slight trepidation when I went, because once or twice she gave me a hard time – but I always listened, because I knew that **she** had been listening to God.

Once she came to me about something that had been weighing on her heart for weeks, and she'd been praying and praying about it, before sharing it with me. That may have been one of her more hidden gifts, but let me tell you, it was one of – if not *the* most valuable gift she had, which she shared with this church family.

Of course she wasn't perfect – some days (and some PCC meetings) she was less perfect than others – but on *these* occasions she lived out the truth of what Jesus prayed for his followers all those years ago:

[Jesus said,] ‘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.’

John 15.15 (NIV)

Annie listened, and she shared; not in a ‘God told me this’ or ‘thus says the Lord’ sort of way, but with humility, grace, and love.

Fruit-Bearer

But the final thing I’d like to say is this – it’s what Jesus says next.

‘You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last.’

John 15.16 (NIV)

In all her gifts, in all her failings, in all her strengths, and in all her weaknesses, in all her joys and in all her sorrows – God *chose* Annie. He changed and was changing her heart and her mind, he equipped her and sent her to bear fruit – fruit that will last.

And it will last. You saw in the photo montage all the different people Annie was friends with – from very young to very old. She bore fruit here over many years – and I trust that fruit will last.

The challenge and encouragement for us is there.

The encouragement is that *God* chooses, and *God* sends, he calls *us* his friends – it all starts with him and comes from him alone.

The challenge is whether we – by God's grace (as the old prayer goes), and through Jesus – might follow the example of all that was good in Annie's life?

I'm going to pray that prayer now, which comes from the *Book of Common Prayer*:

We also bless thy holy Name for all thy servants departed this life in thy faith and fear; beseeching thee to give us grace so to follow their good examples, that with them we may be partakers of thy heavenly kingdom: Grant this, O Father, for Jesus Christ's sake, our only Mediator and Advocate. Amen.

Book of Common Prayer