

John 15:9-17

Easter 6; May 6 & 7, 2018

I would like you to look around at the people who are sitting around you today. As you look around at each other, I want you to think of the answer to this question: *Who are you willing to die for?* It's an easy question to answer, isn't it? I would die for my wife. I would die for my kids, their spouses and my grandkids. I don't think I would even hesitate to do. I would give my life for my family. I would think that most of you would say the same. Would you be willing to die for all those who are sitting around you today?

Who would be on the short list? Other family members? Close friends? The co-worker that you have been with for years and years? If we are honest with ourselves, there would also be others that wouldn't make that list. Would you die for someone who is a criminal? Would you die for the person who isn't your friend? Would you die for a total stranger? I think, we can understand Jesus' words this morning: **"Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."** When you think about that statement of Jesus, there is a simple question that comes to mind? *Who are your friends?* When we think about friends, we think about those who are part of our inner circle. If you think about people who you would consider to be your friends, you probably have common interests, common goals, common likes and dislikes, and so forth. **A friend is someone who likes you, even though he knows you.** A friend is someone who will stick by your side, in spite of all your flaws.

That thought makes Jesus' words all the more powerful today when he says to us: **"I have called you friends."** As you look at that statement of Jesus, you can't help but ask the question: *What does it take to be a friend of God?* If I take a good hard look at myself, I don't deserve to be called a *friend of God*. Do you? Why? I look at those words that are right there in the middle of our text that says: **"You are my friends if you do what I command."** There's the catch, isn't it? **IF YOU DO WHAT I COMMAND.** That's what Satan wants you to believe. He wants you to think that you cannot get into this exclusive club of being Jesus' friends because you don't do **"what I command."** As friends of God, we find joy in doing God's commands.

Jesus did. He says: **"Just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love."** As the Son of God who became human, Jesus understood that he was loved by his Father. He understood who he was. He was loved by his Father. As the Son loved by his Father, he made it his goal in life to do the will of his Father. Not because he had to, but because he wanted to. Jesus found joy in his Father; he found joy in doing what his Father commanded. It was his love for his Father that motivated him to follow him with a selfless, self-sacrificing love.

Let's go back to that question: *Who are you willing to die for?* On January 13, 1982, Air Florida flight #90 took off from Washington National Airport. It was headed to Tampa, Florida. It had been snowing hard all day long. The high temperature for the day was 26 degrees. The airport had been closed for parts of that day. They managed to get one runway open for flights to depart. Air Florida Flight #90 had been deiced before going out onto the taxi way. But it had to wait for nearly 50 minutes in line to get the clearance to leave. During that time, snow and ice had begun to accumulate on its wings and engines. It was later determined that the captain had made a number of errors during the take off. The 737 managed to get off the ground, but it quickly began to stall and the rear of the plane hit a bridge that extended over the Potomac River breaking the plane in two and crashing into the frozen water of the river.

Almost all of the passengers on that flight would die in the frozen water of the Potomac River. But five survived. All five owed their life to the same passenger that day. In the nearly blinding snow, a park service helicopter took off to rescue the six people who were still clinging to the tail of the aircraft that was just above the water line. One of those passenger's name was Arland Williams. It was later discovered that his seat buckle had jammed. Five different times, a helicopter dropped a rope to save Williams. Five times, Williams passed the rope to other passengers or called them off. When the helicopter returned for Williams, he had drowned in the water of the river. 74 people died that day. 5 survived. All five owed their life to Williams, who was a bank examiner for the Federal Reserve System. A man who traded his life for the life of five other total strangers. I was in college at the time, and I can remember some of the images on TV.

That's what Jesus did for the whole human race. **"Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."** He laid down his life for his friends. Who are his friends? One of those friends that jumps to mind is a man named Judas. As Judas stood in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus spoke to him: **"Friend, do what you came for."** (Matt 26:50) Friend. How could Jesus call his betrayer **"friend?"** How can Jesus call us his friends? Every day we sin against him. Every day we fall short. Every day we betray him with our thoughts, words and actions, and yet, he calls us his friends. You see the source of our identity is not found in our actions, but it is found in who Jesus says we are. **"I have called you friends."**

God simply loved people who are not loveable. No conditions. Just pure self-sacrificing love. It is with that kind of love that Jesus says to us: **"This is my command: Love each other."** He loved us by laying down his life for us. And he has taken us from being God's natural born enemies to being those who are called God's friends. He did this by sharing the love of his Father with us. He chose to save us.

The fact that you are through faith in Jesus this day a friend of God is no accident. God knew your name from eternity and chose you to belong to him. There's that security of our identity – the source of our joy. What does it take to be a friend of God? The answer is simple: Jesus. He is someone who still loves us, even though he knows all the sins that we have done. He is the one who says that he remembers our sins no more. Who was Jesus willing to die for? YOU!

What does it take to be a friend of God? Nothing we can do; all that Jesus has done. He chose you to be friends of God. Amen.