

FRIENDS WORTH HAVING

Sermon delivered by Rev. Dr. Roxanne Jones Booth

Rensselaerville Presbyterian Church

August 7, 2022

Scripture: Mark 2:1-12

Good morning, Rensselaerville Presbyterian Church! I greet you all in the wonderful name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! I also bring you greetings from the Riverview Missionary Baptist Church where I serve alongside my husband, the Reverend Antonio Booth, as co-pastor. Thank you again for the invitation to be with you during your summer services.

This is the day the Lord has made and we will rejoice and be glad in it! This morning our Scripture text is found in the Gospel according to Mark 2:1-12. I will be focusing in on verses 1-5 which read, "A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. So many gathered that there was no room left not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. Some men came, bringing to him a paralytic, carried by four of them. Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and, after digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on. When Jesus saw their faith, he said to paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." Our sermon topic this morning is "Friends Worth Having."

I watch television. In fact I enjoy watching television. Usually after my husband and I are finally home for the evening, we relax by watching a little television.

We change into our comfortable clothes and then lounge on the sofa for about an hour before going to bed. This is when the battle for the remote control begins.

My husband enjoys the food channel, watching people prepare recipes from simply ingredients as well as watching competitions between noted chefs. He really likes Chef Ramsey and the show called "Hell's Kitchen."

I enjoy watching "Law and Order" and the news.

A while ago, and I can say now, I guess, back in the day in a 1997 episode of "Friends", Phoebe used the term BFF and explained to the gang that it means best friends forever. I am not sure

if this was the first time BFF was used but around 2010, while flipping through the channels, my husband and I came across a program called “Paris Hilton’s BFF”. The show is no longer on television and Paris Hilton is no longer as popular.

This particular show featured Paris Hilton, the daughter of the millionaire family who owns the chain of Hilton Hotels. On this show, Paris Hilton staged a competition searching for a BFF: best friend forever.

The show took place in the USA; however, there was a show called “Paris Hilton’s British BFF”, which took place in England. The show was about regular and ordinary people competing with one another to be chosen by Paris Hilton as her best friend forever. By the process of elimination, the winner of the competition gets the privilege of being called Paris Hilton’s best friend forever.

The winner gets the title of Paris Hilton’s best friend forever after having competed in challenges which Paris and her personal friends design which humiliate, embarrass and turn each one of the wannabe best friends against each other.

The people who compete to be Paris Hilton’s BFF best friend forever lie on each other, deceive each other, talk about each other behind each other’s back and even sit with Paris Hilton at her request and are asked to tell Paris all the little secrets they may know about another contestant in order to get the others eliminated and be chosen by Paris Hilton as her BFF best friend forever.

After watching the show, a couple of times, I asked myself a few questions,

-Is Paris Hilton buying friends?

-Can a person really call someone a friend who is in a competition to be a friend and will do practically anything to get the title Best Friend Forever?

-Can a person really be a best friend when they have out-lied, out-deceived and talked about other people while trying to make themselves look good?

-What is friendship?

-Can it be bought?

-Is friendship something that can be packaged and sold to the person that wants it the most?

-Is friendship so worthless?

-Are there really any true friends?

-Are there any friends worth having?

In our text this morning, Mark 2:1-5, we find Jesus well into doing what he came on earth to do **and** we also find in the text four men who bring a paralyzed man to Jesus. In today's terms, we can call these four men **friends** and these men in this context are truly **friends worth having**.

By the time we read of this account of these four friends bringing a paralyzed man to Jesus in the Gospel of Mark 2:1-5, Jesus has already been baptized by John the Baptist in Mark 1: 9-13. In Mark 1:14-20, he has called his first four disciples, his students who follow him, Peter, his brother Andrew, and James and his brother John, who are called the sons of Zebedee.

In Mark 1:21-28, we read of Jesus driving out of a man an evil spirit, then in Mark 1:29-34, Jesus heals many including Peter's mother-in-law, and in Mark 1:40-45 Jesus heals a man of leprosy.

When we come to our Scripture text this morning Jesus is preaching and healing for this is what he came on earth to do. Back in Mark 1:35-39, we read that, "...he traveled throughout Galilee, preaching in their synagogues and driving out demons." God through Jesus intended to build a community like nothing that had been seen on earth. A community of healed people sharing the Good News of God.

Here we find Jesus in Mark 2:1-5, most likely with his first four disciples with him at someone's home. When the word got out that he was there at this particular home the people started gathering. People showed up because they heard Jesus had come. He had already healed so many and casted out evil spirits from people. **The word was out** that the man who made the blind to see, and made those who could not walk to walk again was at a certain home. It only took word of mouth that Jesus was around and people who had only heard of what he had done came to see Jesus.

Now the Scripture tells us that so many gathered to hear, see and be healed by Jesus that "there was no room left, not even outside the door." Mark 2:2 says, "So many gathered that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them."

When I first did mission work in Africa back in 1991, I traveled to churches in the countryside of eSwatini and preached in buildings that were made out of wooden planks that were so poorly connected that I could watch people coming to church through the gaps of the plank. The structure that we sat in for worship could not hold everybody, so that once the room was full, women would spread their wraps that they wore over their clothes on the ground and people would sit outside the structure and just listen in at the worship. But as the singing and praising started, I could see through the gaps of the planks of wood the people on the outside worshipping like the people on the inside.

I can imagine what it looked like when Jesus was preaching at that home that day and there were so many people that there was no room left, not even outside the door.

And then four men arrive with a man who is paralyzed. Now the Scripture does not mention the word friend or friends, but when we read the text closely we are only led to believe that these four men had to be friends to the man paralyzed man.

First of all the men must have heard of Jesus and the many who were healed by him. Perhaps they were in the crowd back in Mark 1 when Jesus was at Peter's mother-in-law's home in the evening after sunset when all the sick and demon possessed were brought to Jesus. In Mark 1:33-34, the Scripture says, "The whole town gathered at the door, and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons..." the Scripture says Jesus healed many that evening, but it does not say he healed all who were there.

Perhaps these four men had brought this paralyzed man that evening to Jesus and did not get near enough for Jesus to heal him. These four men had to be true friends. Who else would return again with a paralyzed friend to see Jesus when they only heard that Jesus was at a certain home? Can you imagine the effort it took for four men to get themselves together and decide that they would try it again?

I know from experience that when I ask my husband to do certain things that will require some effort and time, he takes time to process the request and it may be a little while before I get a reply. I have learned that men take more time to process things than women. And that is not a bad thing because my husband knows that I do not process things like he does, so we understand that about each other and it does not become a problem in our relationship.

So these four friends got themselves organized and took their friend who was paralyzed and carried him to see Jesus. These four friends must have been convinced that Jesus was their paralyzed friend's only help. Oh! For friends who know Jesus and know what Jesus can do for us all!

These four friends carry their paralyzed friend on a mat, a bed of some sort, to the only man they know who can heal their friend's condition. Each one of these friends cares about their friend who is paralyzed and knows that if they were paralyzed and could not move the friend they are carrying would do the same for them. **These friends are friends worth having.** People who care for you so much that not even being inconvenienced could keep them from helping a friend who is paralyzed.

These four men must be true friends, because once they get to Jesus, possibly the second time with their paralyzed friend, they discover that they cannot get close enough again. There are too many people again. Possibly just like the last time they tried to see Jesus with their paralyzed friend when they heard he was at Peter's mother-in-law's house, there are too many people. The crowd is too big.

These four men are friends worth having because they were determined to get their paralyzed friend the healing only Jesus can give. These four friends, the Scriptures say in Mark 2:4, "Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus and digging through it, lowered the mat the paralyzed man was lying on."

Oh! What friends, true friends, **friends' worth having.** Can you see them lugging their paralyzed friend up to the roof of the home, putting him down and first taking the covering off the roof?

Research says that roofs in those times were made out of leaves, bark and dirt with wooden beams to support the structure. So before the friends could even begin to lower their paralyzed friend into the home from the roof they had to remove the covering that was the leaves and bark and lastly they had to dig through the dirt.

It didn't matter to these friends the energy, effort, the time or the expense that it would take to get their friend to Jesus. They must have known that when they removed the roof, they would have to repair it again. Their concern for their friend outweighed any cost. The expense of it all didn't matter, their paralyzed friend needed to see Jesus.

No matter what the cost, these friends were determined to get their paralyzed friend to Jesus.

Friends' worth having are friends whether you are well or sick.

Friends worth having are friends whether you are rich or poor.

Friends worth having are friends when you are doing well or when things are not going so well.

Friends worth having will not ask what they will get in return for their friendship.

Friends worth having will tell you what you really need and see to it that you get it.

The paralyzed man needed Jesus and his friends knew it too.

A friend worth having will not stand by and watch a friend make a mistake.

A friend worth having will want their friends to know the love and care of Jesus the one who can heal all our diseases; the one who can comfort us in the time of sorrow.

Because of the paralyzed man's friends, it says in Mark 2:5, "When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven."

Friends worth having know Jesus is the answer. **Friends worth having** will carry you to Jesus.

Friends worth having may not physically carry you to Jesus; however, they will carry you to Jesus in their prayers. When you cannot pray for yourself, **Friends worth having** will pray for you and with you. **Friends worth having** will be with you through the storms and the rain, through sickness and pain.

To live in a community with **friends worth having** is that beloved community that God intended for God's creation. In the beginning God intended to co-exist with humankind forever, the original BFF. However, humankind broke that relationship. But because of God's great love for us, God sent God's self into the world. The Scripture says it this way, "For God so loved the world that God sent God's only son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life".

We thank God for our ultimate friend and join with the hymn writer who wrote:

There's not a Friend like the lowly Jesus:

No not one! No, not one!

None else can heal all our souls; diseases
No not one! No, not one!

Jesus knows all about our struggles;
He will guide 'til the day is done

There's not a Friend like the lowly Jesus:
No not one! No, not one!