

All she had to her name was \$13. And she walked over to the campsite of her friend, Jean, and gave her two of those precious dollars. Jean said right away pushing the money back, "I can't take this, Elsa, you have your two children to feed and this has to last you till the end of the month." "Take it," said Elsa, "you have three children and a husband. And you're in no shape to pick cotton right now." "You have shared clothes and shoes with me. You have shared your coffee and your friendship. It's my turn to share with you."

This is an approximation of a conversation from an historical novel I just finished reading called *The Four Winds* by Kristin Hannah. It's a wonderful yet really heartbreaking story about a family living in the dust bowl of Texas in the 1930s, their exodus to California and their efforts at survival in both states.

Jean and Elsa became good friends living in a squatter's camp by a ditch of dirty water in the San Joaquin Valley of California. It was the best sort of friendship despite all these difficulties. The women were open with each other about their struggles and yet also shared their hopes and dreams with each other.

And it was an unlikely friendship, any friendship was unlikely in that difficult geography. Everyone was just trying to survive – to eat and to work and hopefully one day have a little money saved up. But every family camped there had to compete for a limited number of jobs picking crops, limited space in which to camp, terrible weather, and no sanitary facilities of any sort. It was a dog-eat-dog world for these poor people who had all traveled to California in the 1930s in search of a better life than what they had back in the great plains where the crops and the soil were all blowing away in the drought and the wind.

For Jean and Elsa, their relationship was not a one-way street. One person didn't solely take care of the other – a giver and a receiver. One was not in charge of the other – like a superior with an underling taking orders. Theirs was a bond of mutuality.

And in today's Gospel reading this is the type of relationship that Jesus offers to the disciples and to us as well.

*I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. (Jn. 15:15)*

In this portion of the Gospel of John, Jesus doesn't mean for the twelve to be his servants simply obeying their Lord. He means for them to be on his level, to be part of a fellowship of things shared; faith, prayer, hopes.

Jesus asks the disciples to keep his commandments to love one another, to love God and to bear fruit. This makes it sound as though we are just to obey the orders of our God in Jesus Christ. But another element of friendship, and a very important one, is that we care about what our friends care about. Jesus tells the disciples that everything that God is, he has shared with them. What God cares about; love, justice, offering one's hand to another, gratitude and praise. These are the things that Jesus is passionate about. If we are his friends then we are too.

Friendship is a two-way street. So Jesus cares about what the disciples care about as well. He joins them at the seashore, as they practice of their livelihood of fishing. He listens to those who are suffering, and he cares about what the sick and the suffering are going through.

And all this takes its time. We don't develop friendship immediately. Like a tree that one plants this year in hope of a crop of apples in a few years, we don't expect immediate results. Building a structure takes time. Training our bodies for a long distance run, bike ride or an athletic event in the Olympics takes patience and perseverance. And these are all characteristics of building a relationship – especially a relationship that is of utmost importance to us.

Friends worship God together. Friends share meals together. We have been doing our best to maintain relationships, both familial and that with our friends; on computers, tablets and phones over the last year plus. But our friendships as experienced on Zoom are just not the same, are they? It's better than nothing, but you can't hug, you can't see people's body language. There's just something about being with a person...I can't put my finger on it. Someone better with words than I will be able to pinpoint what we've been missing. There's something about being in the same space together. Haven't we longed for a meal shared together this past year? It's not just about the food, is it? It's being together.

And that kind of helps us understand the ineffable part of friendship. It's everything I've mentioned so far and...s more...it's love, agape love. That is best transmitted in person.

You may have experienced this; say you haven't seen your friend from high school or from your home town in years and you wonder if you still have anything in common, and then when you do meet again in person it's like the relationship was there all along and you take up the conversation sort of just where you left off many years ago. The things that made you friends before are still there. The patterns of speech, the way you laugh, the things you both found interesting and important are still those things. I'm looking forward to seeing a friend who I haven't seen in years during my sabbatical this summer.

And thanks be to God, and thanks be to scientists and physicians who are inspired and gifted, things are opening back up in our country and in our community. We are beginning to see each other in person again. I've been invited back into the nursing homes in our area and will be leading services once again at Geer Village Lodge, Geer Nursing Home and Noble Horizons.

Trinity Church is opening back up too. We have been having in person services as well as our wonderful online services every week now. And on the Feast of Pentecost, May 23<sup>rd</sup>, we will finally share the Holy Eucharist together again. The last time we had Eucharist together was in February of 2020 – fourteen long months ago. I hope that if you live locally and are able, that you will come to church to receive the Sacrament which we have been missing for so long.

This is how we see Jesus in person now. We see the face of Jesus in the faces of our fellow parishioners and friends, and we meet Jesus in Spirit face to face in the sacrament of the Holy Food we share at the altar. What a friend we have in Jesus.