

Children's Talk and Sermon
for Sunday, 26 June

Children's Talk: Being a Good Friend

- What makes someone a good friend? [let the kids answer; sometimes they don't, and that's ok too]
 - Friends will help each other
 - ...be kind
 - ...love each other
 - ...be there when you are sad
 - ...share
 - ...help when you get hurt
 - ...not be mean
- The story of Jonathan and David shows a good friendship in the Word. David was a young shepherd boy, who was not well-known at all
- Jonathan was the son of the king, he was a mighty and well-known prince.
- But they became friends because they were able to have love for one another, even though they were so different:

Now when he had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. ² Saul took him that day, and would not let him go home to his father's house anymore. ³ Then Jonathan and David made an agreement, because he loved him as his own soul. ⁴ And Jonathan took off the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armour, even to his sword and his bow and his belt. (1Samuel 18:1-4)
- Jonathan loved David as much as he loved himself. The Lord says that this kind of love is important for all of us. He taught, "you shall love your neighbour as you love yourself" (Matthew 22:39)
- Friendship isn't just about having fun things to do together; friendship is about loving another person as much as you love yourself:
 - If you would want someone to help you when you are hurt, help your friends when they are hurt
 - If you want someone to share with you, share with them
 - If you want someone to be kind to you, be kind to them
- Real friendship comes from the Lord, and is based on loving someone as much as you can. *Amen.*

Friendship

A sermon by Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs
Delivered by Lance Mansfield at Westville 26 June, 2022

Friendship is something that every human seems to desire, in one form or another. But how often do we think of being friends with the Lord? When you stop to reflect on that concept, it seems pretty obvious that we should be striving to be the best of friends with the Lord.

And here in the text from John, the Lord gives us some very simple and direct instructions as to how we can be His friends. Do whatever He commands – which specifically in this lesson is to love one another as He loves us.

So it appears that in loving one another and forming genuine friendships with those around us, the same basic rules of friendship would apply – doing whatever the Lord commands.

The story of David and Jonathan gives us a powerful and moving illustration of what a genuine friendship should be. Jonathan as the son of King Saul would have been next in line to the throne, except for one big problem. His father had broken his covenant with the Lord and so the Lord had chosen David to become the next king. Jonathan and David were best friends and you might think this could have driven a wedge between them.

However, Jonathan was on the side of what was right and good rather than blindly supporting his own family, and chose spiritual family over blood relationships. And don't we all strive for that precious ideal of having a good friend so close that it feels as though our souls are tied or knit together over a common vision of what the Lord wants? So with this context in mind, let us delve into the subject of friendship and see what the Writings have to say on this important subject.

First, let's look at the beginning verses of John that led up to, "you are my friends if you do whatever I command you." It was an analogy about a vine and the Lord said: "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."

The significance of the vine is that the Lord is talking about conjunction of a person from the spiritual church with Him. (See Arcana Coelestia 1069:5) This is important to know because a person from the spiritual church is reformed by truths in the understanding, as opposed to good in the will, as was the celestial Most Ancient Church.

Therefore, the first order of business for a person of the spiritual church is to learn the truths of the Word which will form his faith, and so aided by truth come to recognize the difference between good and evil. (See Arcana Coelestia 5113:2) So the first step in having conjunction with the Lord, dwelling with Him, and becoming His friend, is to learn the truth of the Word. We must study the vine!

Consequently, the first step in forming any genuine friendship is to study the Word and distinguish between what is acceptable conduct and what is not. How many people today would consider that a prerequisite for any genuine friendship?

Now just knowing the truth does not make a living faith, but a dead one. And a dead faith does not produce charity. Charity, or love toward the neighbor, is the principle love of the spiritual church. (See Arcana Coelestia 1069:5) Charity can only come into existence if faith is lived. When the truth is applied to life then the vine "bears much fruit."

So the second step in forming genuine friendships is being charitable, or living according to your faith. Being genuinely charitable comes in two steps. The first of

charity is to shun evils as sins against the Lord, and the second of charity is to do good deeds which are of use to the neighbor. (See Charity 1; True Christian Religion 435)

This is also a startling new concept about friendship. The primary element of genuine charity and friendship is not to do evils that would harm that person; the second is to do good and useful things for them. Not surprisingly, this takes us right back to the Ten Commandments. One tablet, concerning duties to our neighbor, consists of the “You shall nots”: you shall not murder, commit adultery, steal, bear false witness, or covet.

And we are told in the Writings for the New Church that conjunction can only be effected by the Lord if a person first does what is written on His table. Roughly paraphrased in simple English: The Lord cannot help join us to Himself or to our neighbors and friends unless we shun those evils as sins.

If you reflect on this idea, the truth of it seems obvious. We cannot really say we love the Lord if we can’t even treat the people directly around us decently – with respect, caring and concern. So it is only after succeeding in shunning those evils as sins that we can work on the second of charity and learn to develop the good qualities that are of benefit to our neighbor and help to form genuine friendships.

Murderous and vengeful thoughts and actions will be replaced with a concern for justice and fairness. Adulterous thoughts and actions will be replaced with a zeal for chastity and protecting the sanctity of marriage. The desire to steal will be replaced with sincerity and the desire to give instead of take. Wanting to bear false witness and lie will be replaced with a love of the truth and honesty. And coveting things for ourselves will be replaced with looking out for the needs of our neighbor before our own. (cf. Life 67-91)

Once we reach this state then we are a branch of the vine – a part or instrument of the Lord, which bears much fruit. The fruits of the vine is the good works, deeds or actions that we perform for our neighbor. Faith is nothing if it is merely knowledge and does not look to charity. And charity is nothing if it is not manifested in good works. This is the Lord’s goal – that we be of service to our neighbors. That is why heaven is said to be a kingdom of useful services. (See Conjugal Love 7:3) This is when we obey the commandment fully – to love others as He has loved us. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served but serve. (Matthew 20:28)

There is one more secret contained in these verses from John about the key to forming genuine friendships: “If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full.” (John 15:10-12) The Lord tells us that if we keep His commandments, we will abide in His love. But what was the reason given? That His joy might remain in us and that our joy might be full.

He does not ask us to keep the commandments for any sense of personal self-gratification, but so that we will be happy. And this is in perfect accordance with the three qualities of Divine love and thus of all genuine loves: to love others outside of oneself, to desire to be one with them, for the purpose of making them happy. (See True Christian Religion 43)

This should be a guiding principle in all our interactions with our friends. Are we serving them in such a way that seeks to bring them joy and make them happy – and not just in the short term, but eternally happy? In the long run this will make our joy full, because the Writings define genuine love as feeling the joy of another, as joy in oneself. (See Divine Love and Wisdom 47)

So far we have only covered the guiding principles of forming genuine friendships with others and being a true friend to the Lord. And it is easy to see what a wonderful thing genuine friendship is. But we find in the Writings that along with friendship comes responsibility, accountability and consequences, so they are not to be entered into lightly.

We are told that there are basically two kinds of friendships – interior and exterior. Exterior friendships can be entered into with just about anybody, for mutual benefit, enjoyment and recreation. (See True Christian Religion 446) But interior friendships should only be formed with those who are in good, and we are told to be wary. (Ibid. 449) Some of us may find ourselves repelled by this idea. Aren't those in disorder the ones who need us the most?

Didn't the Lord also teach us, "love your enemies, bless those who curse you, and do good to those who hate you . . . For if you love [only] those who love you, what reward have you?" (Matthew 5:44,46; Faith 21) Yes, the Lord did teach us that, and we should love our enemies and seek to help them in any way that we can. But the caveat is that we should not blindly get sucked into an interior friendship with them. To enter into a deep and interior friendship with a person in open disorder, without regard for the evils they are involved in, produces a serious risk.

If we don't use the truths we learned to discern between what's good and evil, then we slowly become numb to those evils to the point where they no longer are repulsive to us. In this state we gradually allow the line between right and wrong to fade and start to mix good and truth with evil and falsity.

In True Christian Religion these types of interior friendship formed without discrimination are quite dangerous to the "good" person. For in the next life they have a very tough time breaking this interior bond with the "evil" and are compared to "a sheep tied to a wolf, or a goose to a fox, or a dove to a hawk." Or even "like kid goats with leopards . . . kissing each other and swearing to maintain their former friendship." (See True Christian Religion 448)

So we are instructed only to love the good in our friends, and be careful that we don't get tricked into loving, condoning and supporting the evil. Obviously we can't determine someone's interior state but we must use prudence and make the best judgment we can.

Now let's turn our attention back to the beautiful story of David and Jonathan's friendship for illustration. Jonathan was the son of King Saul, and David was the anointed king-to-be by the Lord. This meant that if David became king, Jonathan would never succeed his father Saul on the throne. And yet Jonathan saw the goodness in David and recognized the evil in Saul – his own flesh and blood.

So he was willing to give up the right to be king, and bow to the Lord's will and support the Lord's goodness that he found in David. He was even willing to risk his own life – "to lay down his life for his friend" – if necessary. (I Samuel 20)

We are told that their souls were tied or knit together. Why? Because they shared a mutual love of the same good; they both were striving to serve the Lord's will. And in the covenant they swore together before the Lord, the criteria of their deep and interior friendship became evident.

Jonathan said: "The Lord judge between you and me . . . forever." This was not a friendship entered into blindly. It was based on faith in the Lord's Word, and was to be judged in accordance with the truth. It might have been said, "You are my friend if you do whatever the Lord commands you."

By contrast from this deep bond of friendship, to the point that their souls were knit together and they loved each other as their own soul, it becomes evident how

dangerous it would be to have your soul tied or knit to someone in evil. Because if you allow the evils of a friend to be enmeshed with the good qualities of the Lord in yourself, it will be extraordinarily difficult to rip this fabric apart in the next life.

So as we all strive to form those genuine friendships with those around us that we all treasure, let's remember to separate personality from character and learn to love only what is good in the person. This means that we must first learn the truth, then shun evils as sins,

and finally do good to our neighbor.

In this way we will form genuine lasting friendships based on mutual good, trust and respect, and become a true friend of the Lord by doing what He has commanded us – loving one another as He has loved us. We will be transformed into a fruitful branch of the vine, and then we will no longer be called just servants but friends – because living the truth of the Ten Commandments will set us free.

“You are my friends, if you do whatever I command you.” So if we keep the covenant on our tablet we can be assured we will be the type of friend to others that we hope they will be to us – supportive of the good qualities and not condoning or being accepting of the evil ones. This is the type of friend who will allow the evils and fruitless branches or behaviors to be pruned away so that the good qualities can become more fruitful and prolific. (cf. John 15:2) Perhaps the Lord best sums up all these teachings on forming genuine friendships with one last bit of advice contained in the Golden Rule: “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” (Matthew 7:12) Amen.