



DEXTER UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

7643 Huron River Drive

Dexter, MI 48130

734-426-8480

Living Out Friendship

August 19, 2007

by Dr. Matt Hook

1 Samuel 18:1-5

My older sister Marci is a great guitarist and singer. She leads worship at a church in Traverse City. But when she was first learning to play, she only knew 3 songs: Leaving on a Jet Plane, I Don't Know How to Love Him, and this one: "When you're down, and troubled, and you need a helping hand, and nothin', no nothing is going right....You've got a friend." And we loved it, every time she sang it! But how many of you saw Saturday Night Live when Carol King was the guest star? She was singing this song in a brownstone apartment window, while just below her, out on the street, Steve Martin was getting mugged, robbed, and beaten up. She'd sing "You just call out my name", and Steve Martin would cry out "Carol! Carol King!!" All the while he's getting beat up just below her window. And that went on for the whole song. It was really funny. But it was also a pretty accurate picture of life. Like Carol King, we want to be a friend, but somehow we're oblivious about what to do with our good intentions. Or like Steve Martin, we're caught in the middle of life and can't seem to break free enough to make the connections. Maybe you've wondered too.

Friendship seems like such a simple concept. You have to be a friend to have a friend. Make new friends but keep the old. But somehow, when you graduate, it changes, and it's not so easy. Chances are, the majority of people here today are struggling with some form of isolation, which leads to all kinds of stuff. Husbands on the brink of unfaithfulness. Wives living with an unsustainable schedule. Couples drowning in debt. Teenagers here because their parents forced them. Young men and women who have been told their worth goes no further than their looks or the particular style they choose. Having a friend who will walk with you through life can make all the difference. The good news is the Bible talks about the power of friendship and gives many examples of how to achieve it. You and I need to be a friend for someone else, and have a friend for our own lives, because you never know what part God has called you to play in someone else's life. Is it adversary or friend? Nemesis or encourager? And whether you choose to acknowledge it or not, you are part of someone else's greater story. How are you playing your part?

There is a powerful story in the Old Testament of a deep friendship that David had with Jonathan. You never know what part God has called you to play in someone else's life. David grew up a shepherd. He was also a musician, (he wrote many of the Psalms) and had been anointed by the prophet Samuel to be the next king of Israel. As a young man visiting his brothers, he saw the Philistine champion Goliath, and slew him in battle with a sling. Jonathon was the son of King Saul. And our passage begins right after David killed Goliath. Saul asked David what lineage he was from, and then...

1 Samuel 18:1 After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself. 2 From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return to his father's house. 3 And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. 4 Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt. 5 Whatever Saul sent him to do, David did it so successfully that Saul gave him a high rank in the army. This pleased all the people, and Saul's officers as well.

Soon David would be hunted by Saul who was by now a madman, jealous with rage. He only wanted David dead. But between Saul and David stood a sheltering tree named Jonathan, who neither shook nor shed in

that precarious place. No matter how hard he tried, Saul could not chop down that tree! Loyal and dependable, Jonathon assured David, “*Whatever you say, I will do for you!*” 1 Sam 20:4. No limits. No conditions. No bargains. No reservations. Best of all, when things were at their worst, he “*went to David...and encouraged him in God*” 1 Sam 23:16. Why? Because he was committed to the basic principles of friendship. Because “he loved him as he loved himself” 1 Sam 18:1. It was love that knit their hearts together. The kind of love that causes people to lay down their lives for their friends, as Jesus put it in John 15:13. No greater love exists on the planet.

Look at how their friendship happened: David came on the scene without fanfare. He saw the need, and had the courage. When others saw Goliath as too big to fight, David saw him as too big to miss! (How are you staring down the Goliaths in your life right now?) David went down into that valley in place of everyone there: Saul, Jonathan, and the rest of the Israelite army. He destroyed the one with the power of death.

They say love is measured by its gifts, which is how Jonathan began their friendship. Jonathan gave David his robe. This sounds small, but remember Jonathan was heir to the throne, son of King Saul. His robe speaks of his position. By doing this, it was like he was say “David, I love you and care for you. I want you to have my position. I’d like people to see you in my position.” Do you have a friend that knows you care about them beyond your position? Do your kids know you love them more than the job you hold or the position you are viewed in? Are your friendships based on what positions each of you are in right now? What happens when your position changes? Jonathon gave his tunic and his possessions. In effect, he was saying “David, had you not come, all I have would’ve belonged to Goliath.”

Jonathan gave up his sword. Jonathan’s sword was his protection. When you become friends, you will be so much closer if you lay down your guard. Why don’t we? Because it’s hard to give up our right to self-defense. It’s hard to give it up, and it’s the first thing we take back. Jonathan gave his sword to David. He allowed David to defend him. Jonathan gave up his bow. This was a skill Jonathan had developed. I hope you know some of the things you’re good at. Jonathan said “David, if you can use it, do!” If we can look for opportunities to share the things were good at for our friends’ sakes, how much richer our friendships become! Imagine a community in which everyone looked for ways to share their skills in the lives of one another?

And Jonathan and David shared their covenant of friendship before the Lord. Have you included God in your friendships? David and Jonathan held their friendship before God and encouraged one another in their walks with the Lord. Do you pray for your friend? Have you ever prayed with your friends? Whose branches are you under? How refreshes you in the fight? Or who are you providing shelter for these days? Friendship it vital to your health in every way. Did you ever think of your friends as gifts from God?

And one more thing we can learn from David and Jonathan: They evidence how to take friendship to a whole other level. Did you know you can be friends of God’s? Look at John 15: Jesus said “*Greater love has no one than this: that he lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command. 15 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.*”

Put this together with how David and Jonathan began. David came without fanfare. Why do we love Jesus? God the Creator of all that is came to us as a tiny baby and the world almost missed it. David came with courage. Jesus had that same nature. Acts 10:38 “*God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him.*” David went into the valley in place of Jonathan and the others. David destroyed the one with the power of death. Do you see? Jesus’ conquests were the same.

David showed his love by putting his life on the line. Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. Jonathan showed his love, measured by his gifts. Jonathan gave his robe, his position over to David. What if we did the same for Jesus? Jesus, I want you to have my position. I’d like them to see you in that position. Jesus, when you went into that valley of death, you deserve to have it all. What if everyone gave their all for Christ’s Kingdom? Jonathan gave his sword and his bow, his right to self-defense and his skill. What if we

gave up that right to Jesus? We could say “I’ll use my skill under your direction, at your command.”

Jonathan was a part of David’s greater story. You are a part of someone’s greater story. Are you strengthening them? Are you encouraging them in God? And think about when you become a friend of God. You become a part of God’s greater story: the story of redemption for all of creation. The story of the good news for all of humanity! Talk about a great epic to be a part of! And you have a role to play in it, because Jesus has included any who keep his commandments as his friend. But one thing more about Jonathan’s love for David: Their friendship seems to have been rivaled. Something must have happened. Could it have been that Jonathan went back to his palace? That he never went *with* David? Here’s why I say that. It wasn’t long before Jonathan was killed by the Philistines along with his father, King Saul. (That’s when David became king). But David, after becoming king, makes a list of his great men; (2 Samuel 23:8) and Jonathan isn’t mentioned.

Jonathon laid his stuff at David’s feet, but that was the end of it. He never went with David. He was like Carol King, singing all the right words, but never darkening her door to step outside, beyond her comfort zone. I think Jesus is inviting many of us here this morning—some of us for the first time: to lay all your “stuff” at his feet and begin this new relationship with God. To claim friendship with God, through Jesus. I think Jesus is inviting others of us who have laid our stuff at his feet to make sure we don’t pick it up again. And he’s calling us to go with him. To follow him, even to unknown places. It could be ministry as a career. It could be helping the poor. Fighting injustice. Reaching out to your neighbor. You may not know where you will follow him, but haven’t you noticed that when you’re with a good friend, it doesn’t matter where you’re going, as long as you get to go there together? It’s the same with Jesus. It doesn’t really matter what he calls you to, as long as you’re going there with him as your friend. Amen.