

Let us pray.

O God of Love, O God of Truth;

Let us say strong things gently and gentle things strongly.

Let us speak the truth in love to all  
and love the truth that lives in each.

Let us hear the truth as we each need it and live that truth.

O God, we heed it through Jesus; Your Word & our Lord.

Amen.

### **With Friends Like These**

*Selected verses from Proverbs*

*Proverbs 18:24 "One who gathers unreliable friends  
soon comes to ruin, but there is a kind  
of friend who is far closer than a sibling."*

*Proverbs 17:17 "A friend loves at all times..."*

*Proverbs 27:9 "Oil and perfume make the heart glad,  
but the great sweetness of a friend  
comes from earnest counsel."*

*Proverbs 17:9 "One who forgives fosters friendships.  
One who dwells on disputes alienates all*

*John 15:12 ff*

*"This is my (last) commandment (to you) - that you love one another  
as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this - to give your life  
for a friend. You are my friends if you follow this. I do not call you  
"servants" any longer, I call you "friends". Servants know not the  
master's plans, but I have revealed all that I am about to you; all that  
my (heavenly) Father has made know to me. You did not choose me but I  
chose you. I chose you to bear fruit - fruits that will live on. The Father  
will bless you in my name whatever you ask if you love one another."*

Wildfires are raging all round the world.  
Sad reminders of Climate Change  
and the shape of things to come if we do nothing.  
Certainly, our prayers are heartfelt and constant  
for all whose lives are in ashes.

But historically fire has been the source of so much  
goodness for humanity.

Picture our ancient ancestors gathered round a fire  
as the light flickers off their faces.

The warmth they enjoy is the warmth of community;  
cooking the prey of the hunt together,  
baking bread together,  
eating meals together, forging metals, heating homes  
purifying instruments - all thanks to fire.

Anthropologists theorize religion began around fire.

Lightening bolts first engendered our fright & awe  
for the heavenly powers but left behind fire.

And reverence and religion soon followed.

So faith and fire go hand-in-hand.

Little wonder that the symbol of "The Holy Spirit"  
in the bible - is wild fire?

I especially love the bonding power of fire on canoe trips.

Soulful friendships are nurtured round campfires.

Moods are lifted as the smoke and embers  
rise into nighttime skies.

Warmth and light breed security  
while the chill and darkness ~~is~~<sup>are</sup> kept at bay.  
Campfires inspire stories, confessions, questions  
like few other venues ever do.  
And the fire helps generate reverence for our several  
worship services.  
At our 1<sup>st</sup> campfire we always read this poem  
by John Oxenham.

**Kneel always when you light a fire.  
Kneel reverently  
and thankful be for God's unfailing charity.  
And on ascending flame inspire a little prayer  
which shall up-bear  
the incense of your thankfulness.  
For this sweet grace of warmth & light  
is Sacrifice for your delight...**

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We humans are made for companionship.  
*"It is not right that human (Adam) be alone."*  
said Yahweh (God), in the 2<sup>nd</sup> creation story.  
*"I will make a companion."*

Psychology says the same.  
The human psyche needs friends to develop normally.  
Friends to teach love and understanding,  
to play with and learn conflict resolution and  
how to handle difference and diversity.

Friendships to model compassionate & receive it.

I see soulful need for friendship in my 2 grandchildren.

Both born during Covid

the two of them are like city mouse & country mouse.

Ian has only known country living;

the lone child amidst grown-up family and friends.

Sloane has only known city living,

and since infancy was going to day-care

and learning to live with a wide diversity of kids

and deal with strangers.

When our two little mice get together

all Ian wants to do is be close to Sloane

whereas Sloane wants to get out and see the world.

Ian craves friendships. Sloane has plenty.

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But lately, in our culture,

the spirituality and value of friendship

has come under fire.

Many of our national and cultural role-models

show an appalling display of what friendship means.

Then there's social media.

A recent article from Cornell Univ.

says "Social media is killing your friendships".

Sure social media has helped build connections,  
but it has diluted relations.

For example, many people have more than 150  
so-called “friends” on Facebook

but they are - at best acquaintances by information

They are not “friends” in the truest and best sense.

Devotion to those pseudo-friends can feel genuine  
but the relationship is mostly superficial.

Is it any wonder that depression is on the rise?

Is it any wonder that 61% of Americans  
say they are lonely.

Which is interesting because that would mean  
many are lonely despite being married!

Is it any wonder that our nation is as divided as it is,  
and why so many can easily identify their “enemies”?

Could it be because of the dying art of friendship?

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No one knows the sacred value of friendship  
more than teen-agers.

They crave them. They need them. Good ones.

Healthy ones. Honest ones.

And I can think of no better definition of good,  
healthy, soulful friendships than the one Jesus offers  
in our reading today from the Gospel in John.

*“No one has greater love than this - to give your life for a friend. You are my friends if you follow this. I do not call you “servants” any longer, I call you “friends”. Servants know not the master’s plans, but I have revealed all that I am about to you; all that my (heavenly) Father has made know to me. You did not choose me but I chose you. I chose you to bear fruit - fruits that will live on. The Father will bless you in my name whatever you ask if you love one another.”*

In these beautiful words

we find a wonderful set of guidelines for healthy, soulful friendships - what one could call, “holy friendship”.

And we find 3 traits that help us find “holy friends” in our lives.

1<sup>st</sup> - the trait of Sacrifice.

*“There’s no greater love than to sacrifice for a friend.”* said Jesus. Friendship inspires in us a powerful sense of sacrifice.

Sometimes that sacrificial energy can be so incredibly strong it is hard to contain.

You want to give your all, your everything.

Often times that first inkling that you have a love DEEPER than just friendship is when you feel a tsunami of sacrifice.

It can be a beautiful thing - a bonding thing -

but it can also be something others take advantage of.

From on-line dating to internet conspiracies

swindlers and liars abound and thrive on your sacrifice.

From another angle,  
true friendship may even need to sacrifice nice-ness  
and agreement.

I've seen how friendship has morphed into meaning  
strict loyalty and agreement.

And that includes never telling on a friend,  
never "ratting", never "narcing", keeping secrets -  
even detrimental secrets that could kill.

The other day I heard the situation of a guy  
who knew his friend was going downhill due to cocaine.  
He'd quit his job. His temperament was changing.  
His health was at risk.

True friendship would have reached out for help for  
that friend - even at the sacrifice of nice-ness.

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This leads us to Jesus' 2<sup>nd</sup> trait of holy friendship.

*"I do not call you "servants" any longer, I call you "friends".  
Servants know not the master's plans,"*

Holy friendship is never a relationship  
when one person is there to serve another.  
Friendship and servant-hood DO NOT go together.  
When someone you hope is your friend  
constantly tries to get something from you  
and never gives back in reciprocity and equality  
that friendship is lopsided and definitely not holy.

Our national decline in friendship  
can be attributed to people being used by other people.  
There are so many people in authority politically,  
religiously, socially and economically,  
who pretend to be your friend,  
but only want your vote, only want your money,  
only want your business  
only want your follower-ship.

Alas, there are so many desperate, lonely people  
isolated, depressed, angry - especially during Covid -  
who are more than willing to blindly serve:

Serve as a soldier in a cause.

Serve as a groupie to a celebrity.

Serve as a disciple to an ideal.

But a true friend doesn't seek servants of any kind.

As Jesus said, *"I no longer call you servants,  
I call you friends."*

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The 3<sup>rd</sup> trait of holy friendship is the most puzzling  
and perhaps the most important.

It's hidden in these words:

*"All that my (heavenly) Father has made know to me. (I have made known to you) You did not choose me but I chose you. I chose you to bear fruit..."*



There is a part of friendship not of our own choosing.  
It is a part we may not even want to hear,  
but it is given to us as if from God.  
It is a part that is meant to help us bear fruit  
but that may mean a little bit of pruning!

The Book of Proverbs focuses a lot on wise friendships.  
And this passage in particular echos Jesus.

*“Oil and perfume make the heart glad,  
but the great sweetness of a friend  
comes from earnest counsel.”*

One of the richest gifts left to us by Celtic Christianity  
is the idea of the “Anam Cara”.

“Anam” is Gaelic for “soul,  
and “Cara” is the word for “friend”.

Back in the early Celtic church of the 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>  
and 7<sup>th</sup> centuries, one of the greatest blessings  
in a person’s life was to have an ‘Anam Cara’ -  
a soul friend.

Someone whom you loved and were certain  
loved you back.

Someone whom you would sacrifice for  
and they for you.

And most of all, someone who could speak  
God’s truth to you - a truth that was sometimes  
hard to hear, but you needed to hear it  
in order to be right with God and yourself.

Here is where so many modern friendships fall short.

They are so based on cordiality - never conflict.

They are based on agreement, not honesty.

Instead of that philosophy,

**“say strong things gently and gentle things strongly”**

many modern friendship follow the creed,

**“say nice things only. And dodge honesty at all costs  
if it might lead to unpleasantness.”**

“You can no longer be my friend”

~~When~~ one public figure recently retorted about a person  
who spoke truth to him- God’s truth as he saw it.

But the recipient couldn’t accept it.

That 1<sup>st</sup> person could never be an “anam cara”

let alone, have one to call his friend.

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And so,

as his last will and testament to his disciples,

Jesus left one of his most precious gifts;

he left them a new and holy relationship called “friendship”.

Because “friendship” encapsulated how best

his love would live on in them.

In conclusion, and to set us off smartly for our canoe trip,

I quote that great Celtic theologian, Teilhard de Chardin.

**“Someday, after mastering the winds, the waves,**

**the tides and gravity, we shall harness for God**

**the energy of Love - then, for the 2<sup>nd</sup> time in history,**

**we will have discovered FIRE.”**

## PRAYER OF PASTORAL CARE July 31, 2022 Dorset

God of heaven and earth, in your wisdom you made the whole creation and called it good. You have lavished your creatures with beauty and sustained us with your grace. Even so, we are distracted and seduced, and wreak havoc on the world you made. Humbly, then, we pray to you for comfort and peace, saying.,  
Gracious God, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those who declare war, those who wage it, and all those who suffer from it. Our prayers are with the people of Ukraine, and of Russia at this time. We thank you for all who are giving humanitarian aid and other kinds of support. We pray that food from harvests may be shipped to help feed hungry peoples. May world leaders, including our own, open avenues of communication toward the day when diplomacy may replace death and destruction. We pray for all people caught up in areas of conflict and violence in our world.  
Gracious God, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for your creation, that the earth's wounds may be healed and we become better caretakers and stewards for ourselves and generations to come. We thank you for the renewing of the canoe trips this week, and pray for their interaction with nature and community, and for the safety of all involved. Bless them with an extra dose of your Spirit on their way. We pray for all who suffer from wild fires, and extremes of climate. Be with the people of Kentucky, in the loss of life and of homes in flash flooding this week. We thank you for all who help others in times of disaster. Gracious God, **hear our prayer.**

We pray for those who fight despair, for those who struggle with addiction, and for any who live without hope. ... Our prayers are for those who are ill, and all who care for them. ... And we pray for the secret burdens of our hearts... Gracious God, **hear our prayer.**

We lift up before you those on this church's crisis prayer concerns list,

Grateful for your mercy, we entrust these and all our prayers to you, O God, through Jesus Christ, in whose name we pray. Amen.

### OFFERING

God pours out blessings upon us, not so we can hoard or take pride in what we have, but that we might share our goods with the same generous spirit.

With joy, let us bring our tithes and offerings to God.

### \*DOXOLOGY

### \*PRAYER

All we have and all we are comes from you, O God. Take these offerings, we pray, and increase our generosity that everything we say and do, might show forth your irrepressible love. Through Jesus our Lord. Amen.

