

Friendship with God is “the fulfillment of the transcendent dignity and calling of every human person.” (*First Things*, “Pornography and Acedia, April, 2012, 45) Jesus Christ has reestablished friendship with God. **When we were God’s enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his son** – Romans 5:10. Jesus Christ has created a new community of faith, the Church, which has been restored to friendship with God. Your faith in Christ and your participation in the Church give you a share in that friendship.

Growing friendship with God is the work of a lifetime. The five sermons that began last Sunday address some of the barriers and bridges to friendship with God. Their purpose is to take down the barriers and to grow and deepen the friendship.

The barrier we began to dismantle last Sunday was disillusionment. Broken dreams and broken promises disillusion people. Someone disappoints you; you disappoint yourself; and you start to think: “What’s the point? Why should I try? **When the foundations are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?**” Psalm 11:3.

The bridge over that barrier and into a deeper friendship with God is a conviction about God. Romans 5:20 says: **Where sin increased, grace increased all the more.** That means: Don’t give up on God. **Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good** – Romans 12:21. That conviction is rooted in reality. God is at His best when Man is at his worst. That’s the meaning of the cross.

Antidote to Lip Service – Part One

A second barrier to friendship with God is lip service. The Prophet, Isaiah, said it first, and Jesus reaffirmed it. **These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me** – Mark 7:6. In the Church sexual sins and stealing money from the church and bullying people make headlines, but paying lip-service to God is hands down the most dangerous temptation Christians face.

How do you feel when someone tells you what you want to hear, but you know the person doesn’t mean it; he just wants to get you off his back. That’s lip service, and I can’t think why God would like it any more than we like it. So, what do we do about it? Romans 6:11-13 offers an antidote to lip service that you don’t want to miss.

Let’s start with verse 11: **In the same way count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Count yourselves dead to sin.** There’s action for you to take: **count**, consider seriously. Being a friend of God means your old life without God is over, as if a kind of death had taken place. It means you will say no to ungodly behavior that you once tolerated and excused. Just saying no is only part of friendship with God, but if you can’t say no to ungodly behavior, what kind of friendship is it?

What are you going to do about that this week? Let’s do a brief spiritual exercise. In the next 30 seconds what ungodly behavior of yours comes to mind? Let it come and ask yourself, “Am I willing to say no to that behavior this week for the sake of my friendship with God?” The 30 seconds begin right now. (Wait 30 seconds.)

Verse twelve encourages us to say no. **Therefore, do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires.** If you can’t say no for a week, maybe the ungodly behavior already has you in its grip. That’s not much of a friendship with God.

Antidote to Lip Service – Part Two

We are not finished with verse 11. The best is yet to come. **Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Count yourselves alive to God in Christ**

Jesus. Once again, there's action for you to take: **count**, consider seriously. Being a friend of God means you are alive to God. Your new life with God has begun, as if the resurrection from the dead had already begun in your soul. It means that you should be prepared for changes in your life that you dared not hope for before. God has good things in mind for us. We know He loves us (Romans 5:8). We know He wants us to share in His holiness (Hebrews 12:10). We know He wants us to have life to the max (John 10:10). A lifetime of discovering good things with God awaits you.

Now comes a surprise. Verse 13: **Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have returned from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness.** Your body is indispensable to your friendship with God.

We sometimes refer to the body as a bag of bones. It is so much more. It is God's tool kit. Your eyes, ears, tongue, hands, and feet are the tools. How shall we use these tools? The tools are neutral. How we use them is anything but neutral.

One use is for evil, **as instruments of wickedness.** That's the ungodly behavior we say no to. The apostle said, "Do it differently." **"Offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness."** How many ways can a screwdriver be used? How many ways can your body be used for good? I'd like to offer two ways that can make a dramatic difference in your life.

The first is to pray – everyday. If you don't think you know how to pray, let me start you with three ways you can pray everyday. First, say the Lord's Prayer. If you don't know it, you'll find it in Matthew 6:9-13. Second, thank God for something good in your life. Third, ask God to do something good for the people you love.

A second way to use your body for good is to discipline yourself to be here every week. It makes a difference in your friendship with God just like walking a mile everyday makes a difference to your health. I hope you'll be here Thursday night for the Holy Thursday service. There's childcare. It's a good discipline to begin when you are young. I hope you'll be here noon-3:00 p.m. on Good Friday, or come and go as you can.

What are you going to do about this in the week ahead? Let's do another brief spiritual exercise. In the next 30 seconds what ways of using your body for God come to mind? Let them come and ask yourself, "Am I willing to do it for the sake of my friendship with God?" The 30 seconds begin right now. (Wait 30 seconds.)

Communing with Our Friend

It is time to commune with our Friend, our Father in Heaven and our Lord, Jesus Christ. As we do, let's do a reprise of our spiritual exercises. Remind yourself of behavior that doesn't belong in a friendship with God and ask yourself, "Am I willing to say no to that behavior this week for the sake of my friendship with God?" Remind yourself of what ways of using your body for God and ask yourself, "Am I willing to do that for the sake of my friendship with God?"

If you do not yet have a share in the Church's friendship with God, why not change that right here, right now? Believe in your heart that God raised Jesus from the dead, and then say publicly that Jesus is Lord. This could be the most important Communion service in your life. If you do that, tell me on the Connection Card.