I don’t know about you, but I have been really appreciating this particular sermon series. It is good for us to stop and think through what it is we are all about. What it is that we fight for. Some Christians put int their weekly hour on Sunday and call it good, but we know that God has so much more for us. We know that following Christ included every part of our lives…it’s hard! In a world of impending bills and demanding bosses, of strained relationships and other people in general, of Netflix and comfy couches, it is hard to lay it all down and follow Jesus with everything that we are.

So this series has been a joyful challenge. A challenge because it’s hard and joyful because that is what following Jesus creates…joy. We are trading the good stuff for the best stuff.

For me however, this week might just be the hardest. Today we are discussing how and why it is that disciples of Jesus make…friends. Now, any preacher worth his salt preaches to himself as much to the congregation, and let me tell you, this one is for me. I am a natural hermit…I’d be a monk if I didn’t love my wife so much. It’s not that I hate people, they’re just…annoying. They have too many opinions and too many different ways of doing things. It’s just work to deal with other people. It’s easier to keep to myself. Give me a stack of theology books, a few translations of the bible, maybe a guitar, a locked chamber all to myself and I will become an expert on God, I will develop such a healthy spiritual life that I might as well be walking hand in hand with Jesus. Yep, just Jesus and me…no other humans to distract me or steal away my energy. God would have my all in all…

But let me tell you what would actually happen. I truly believe if you gave me a guitar and Bibles and a secluded chamber, I truly would find it to be an invigorating and fruitful time with God. I think I would draw closer to him, I would, as pastor David mentioned last week…I would follow Jesus so closing that I would be covered with the dirt we kicked up…and that’s just it…if I were to truly follow Jesus, I would not live and work in my chamber for long…because Jesus is out there. Jesus is in the middle of the distraction, annoying, demanding and faithless…people. If I were to follow closely behind Jesus I would surrounded myself with people, and Jesus would be teaching me how to have compassion for them.

We are Christinas…disciples…we follow Jesus. We don’t get to have an ivory tower. We make use of our prayer closets, and go out to interact and love people.

This is hard for me, but God calls me to nothing less. Disciples make friends.

We are going to intereact with each other right now turn to your neighbor or get into groups of three or four, and share with your group your answer to this question: Do you use self-checkout at the store? Why or why not?

How many of you use the self-checkout? I love it. They have so many of them now, at Wal-Mart for example, they the line goes really quickly. You scan your stuff and ven when the machine beeps at you bewcasue you merssed something up, the employee comes over and scans there things and hits some buttons and off you go. They usually donp;t weven look at you much less ask you if you found everything alright? I mean really, I’m checkoing out now…isn’t a little late for that question. So buig thumbs up for the self-check out. Maximum eefficiy, minimal human interaction. Get in get out. Done.

How many of you prefer the antiquated method of employing humnas?

Let me tell you if I am ever shopping with my wife, she refuses to use a self-check out. And she won’t let me use one either. >>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>>

So she is against it.

But we have had quite a few experiances now where the person checking us out has just been very awkward, or overly friendly or maybe completely rude. And we will get our bags and take the receipt on on the way to the parking lot I’ll make a coment such as, “That’s why I like self check outs.” To which she always rolls her eyes. But I fifuer hey, if I can avoid any threat of weirdness why wouldn’t I?

I am going to say something publically and on the record to all of you….I think, in this instance, my wife is right. Now if my priority is to be efficient and easy, well then I’m right. But if my priority is to love people, to have compassion for them, to see them through the eyes of Jesus, well then my wife is right.

If you want to make friends, you have to be a friendly person. If you want to be a good friend, you have to live selflessly. Jesus himself says in John 15:13 that the height of love is for someone to give up their lives for a friend. Whoa what? You mean friends don’t just have lunch together once in a while?

Well, let’s make sure we start at the beginning. For Jesus, it all begins with love, which means it begins with God. Look at John 15:9; As the Father loved me, I too have loved you. Remain in my love. So love is the root of this tree, and that love is not just a feeling, it is the self-sacrificing love that puts the other first. This is our ground zero. We have to understand this first. It seems backwards dosen;t it? We typically think of friendship as the beginning and sometimes that freindship leads to love right? But we need to look at our relationships through the lens of God’s ultimate sacrificial love.

So when we think through our lives, we pretty much have three tiers of relationships that we can chart out as a continuum. So let’s use our little note sheet and write this out with me as we go. We have acquaintances. These are people who we find ourselves in close-proximity too. Co-workers, neighbors, people who know in the community, maybe fellow church goers. These are people who are around you yet you do not know them very well. Your relationship is based on proximity. So take a moment a write down the name of someone you know by proximity. Put them down on that portion of the spectrum.

Our next level is what I am going to call a friend. Friend is a very broad term., the dictionary defines friendship as two people of mutual affection. I think of it as patronage. Friends share interests. They attend the same concert or eat at the same restaurants. Friends usually haver some interests in common that the share. Friendship can become much more then that, but typically this idea of patronage it where people mover from just acquaintances, to friends. C.S.Lweis quipped that friendship is born at the moment someone says to someone else, “What, you too!” I know many good friends in college simply because I found some people who like the same obscure music that I listen to. So who is someone in your life that you could call a friend. Someone you share interests with?

The last portion of our line then is family. Now of course we have blood relatives with whom we are genetically related, but I actually want to talk about the brotherhood and sisterhood of fellow believers. Those who call on Christ, identify with Christ and have been adopted as Son and daughters of God himself. See, a familial relationship is based on paternity. And if God has become our heavenly father, then we who have experienced the reality of adoption can rightly be considered brothers and sisters.

Over here on this end of the continuum, we are bound together by something beyond ourselves. The Holy Sprit, the Spirit of adoption, the Spirit of truth, binds us to one another as family. So listen, you can choose your friends, but you can’t choose your family. Sometimes family members can be the toughest ones to love, but our commitment and identity in Christ transcends our interests and the thins we patronize. Christ is greater than our hobbies, greater than our preferences. We love because he first loved us. We give of ourselves because he gave himself for us.

Now here is our calling, here is how we live this out everyday. Take a look at the names of the people you have written, pray for those people. Then do what you can to move those folks to the next tier. What can you do to turn an aquaintence into a friend or a friend into family. What can you do to help them take the next step toward Jesus? That is the goal here. As disciples, we do not follow Jesus in a bubble or an isolated tower. We follow Jesus on the ground, among people we naturally like and people we want to stay away from. But we are to love both.

So what is God’s love calling you to do?