

Best Friends: Shared Interest
Aug. 28th 2022

Throughout this series, we have been trying to think through what it means to live with Jesus as our best friend. We talked through a few factors that complement a healthy friendship: Loyalty, Joy, Support, and today we are going to consider the importance of shared interest.

As a young man, I was a bit of an outlier in my high school. My musical preferences did not match that of most people. I never listened to the radio, I never paid attention to the top hits. But any money I came across I would spend it on CDs and I would listen to complete albums from beginning to end following along with the little lyrics insert. I loved music...I still do, but I wanted to listen to something that was real, honest and authentic. The pop stuff on the radio was so polished and catchy...I still cannot stand it to this day. I suppose I have become an old man because I can't help but feel like they just don't make music like they used to.

I remember going off to college and as I was trying to meet new people during my first week on campus, I came across a couple of guys who I overheard talking about a particular band, Living Sacrifice. I stopped in my tracks. As far as I knew, I was the only human on the planet who listened to that band. I was the only one I knew of who had any appreciation for what they were doing. And in that moment, I had new friends. We were instantly bonded over our common interest in musical tastes. Those complete strangers were now somehow made close brothers because I felt I knew them. We shared something that was important to us, something that reflected who we were. Of course, from this starting point, we were able to discuss many more topics but that initial shared interest proved to be a powerful force.

That sense of unity is a pretty rare experience. We are going to turn to our passage from John 15, and as we read through it, think about what Jesus' main interest is here, the interest that he longed to share. It won't be too hard to figure out. READ.

Okay, any guesses? In these nine verses, Jesus uses the word for love nine times! He is highlighting a point here: His main interest is love. And he shares with us the love of the Father so that, if you look at verse 17, “you can love each other.” Now men, I want to speak to you for just one moment. You can keep this answer to yourself, but I want to ask, “What comes to mind when I say to you ‘Jesus’ main interest is love?’” Does that get you excited? Does that make you want to go out and stomp down the gates hell through the power of the Holy Spirit? Or does it sounds more like a sentimental look through old family pictures. And women, how about you? When you think of this love of Jesus, do you think of drawing the sword of the Spirit and going into battle on behalf of the lost in our families and neighborhoods? Or do you feel the quiet calm of a contended sigh.

Church, we have a problem. We have misunderstood Jesus’ love. We have emasculated it, domesticated it, confined it. We have turned the lion into a house cat. The love that Jesus speaks of includes the warmth of family and contentment. But it is that same love that drove Jesus to the cross. Look at verses 12 and 13. We are commanded to love one another and then told that the love includes giving up our lives for one another. We are to love one another like Jesus loves. That does not mean giving out high-fives and hugs, that means giving of ourselves for the sake of someone else. It is not warm fuzzies, it is stone-cold commitment. As Christians we share in this commitment together. We have a common interest that strikes right to the heart of who we are. We held in common the same sentence. We were under the same condemnation. But thanks to this love of Jesus, we now share in that same love of the same Savoir who have himself up for us. We now share a great inheritance for all eternity and what’s more, we have a shared mission.

I don’t think a sermon series about best friends would be complete without an appearance from Batman and Robin. As we all know, the best version of the dynamic duo comes to us from the 1960s when men were men and heroes were heroes. In the movie, Batman is viciously attacked by an exploding shark while dangling from the ladder of the Batcopter. He was investigating the mysterious

disappearance of a yacht while out at sea. But who could be behind such a devious plot? Take a look at this clip as Batman and Robin are briefed by commissioner Gordon about the “known super-criminals still at large”: WATCH.

Now, of course this example is a bit silly, I mean, how could it be that all four super criminals are working together on the same evil plan? But there is thought that strikes me...it's so dreadful I dare give it utterance...just as Batman and Robin were up against staggering villainy between the combined forces of Catwoman, the Riddler, the Penguin AND the Joker, we, church, are up against much darker more insidious powers. We face unseen spiritual forces, the constant accusations spewed by Satan, the ever-present pull of complacency and of course the darkness of our own hearts. These are not realities to be trifled with or ignored. And if we let them, they will succeed in diluting the love of Christ, both in this world and within us. They seek to lame the roaring lion. Batman and Robin head off at once to tackle the crime problem in Gotham City. They are both wholly committed to the mission. They have no allusions as to who they are up against. They work together in this mission and more than that, they realize that they need each other in order to accomplish their goal of catching the bad guys. We are not all that different. We too are united under a common cause: to love as Jesus did and through that love, to overcome this world. And though we take this mission to heart as individuals, I think we are aware that success is much more achievable together.

But having a shared interest with other people is a far cry from having a shared interest with Jesus himself. He was a man on a mission, and he called others to share in that same mission. We are those who are so called. We are the ones to carry out the mission begun by our best friend Jesus. The requires us to be united with Jesus. We not only have a shared interest with him, we long to have the mind of Christ. We long to live with the heart of Christ. Jesus speaks of this unity in Matthew 12. As he was casting out demons and healing people and lying waste to the dark forces of this world, the Pharisees witnessed what the coming of God's kingdom could do. They, of course, were at odds with

Jesus. They did not share in his interests. They were concerned with retaining their own power and prestige. They wanted to enforce arbitrary rules on those who were trying to follow God's ways. And so, in order to disparage the miracles that Jesus performed, they claimed that he must be working in league with the devil himself. Jesus quickly points out the error of such thinking. He says, "A house divided against itself cannot stand". And in verse 30 Jesus simply says: "Whoever isn't with me, is against me, and whoever doesn't gather with me scatters."

It doesn't matter how righteous you might think you are, or how righteous someone else might think you are. It doesn't matter how many rules you can follow. It doesn't matter what opinions or political persuasions you may hold. Jesus cuts through all that noise when he says: "If you're not for me, you are against me." This is a black and white statement that we cannot avoid. We can't come back to Jesus and say, "Well I kind of am, I mean I mostly am with you." Neutrality here is not acceptable.

Imagine if Batman and Robin took it to the Batmobile, jump inside, fire up that turbine booster thing and Robin says, "Wait, wait, Batman...I'm not too sure about this. What if these criminals are just misunderstood? What if we could help them? I can't go through with this mission." A waffling Robin is a sad and cowardly picture. But how much more tragic for those of us who try to walk the fence, who lose sight of the mission, who allow the cares of this world to choke out the life that Jesus offers. We must keep to the mission. In all things we must choose, what to eat or drink, which route to take to where we are going, what radio station to listen to. There are endless choices like these that fill up our days, but how often do we give mind to choices that face us regarding our mission? Famed biblical commentator William Barclay wrote, "The refusal to give one side assistance is in fact the giving of support to the other." We are stuck in a warzone between good and evil. We are called to love as Jesus loved, not with sentimentality and niceties, but with truth and power and great courage. We find strength in our unity with each other and with Christ and we do not shrink from battle, we do not shirk our commitment to Jesus.

This really is a life changing call. For too long too many people have seen church as a place of respite and comfort and safety. But this does not line up with the love that Jesus demonstrated for us. Christ lays before us a mission. To engage in a mission is to willingly take on a challenge. No one is going to watch Batman and Robin if they sat around all day in recliners. And yet, as Barclay says, "Often we would rather have the comfort of selfish inaction than the adventure of action for Christ." God forgive us for such an outlook. God forgive us for scattering when we ought to be actively gathering. God forgive our lack of unity.

Thankfully, God does forgive us. We are afforded another chance to take up arms and together wage war against the spiritual powers of this dark world. Is there some way that you might be more mindful of the battle that surrounds you? Is there some way to take action to ensure that you are gathering with Jesus? Maybe it is taking a prayer walk, or spending some extra time with the Bible or taking a bold stand against something in your life that you know is not working in tandem with the Lord, whatever it might be, we pray that God would fill us with his Spirit as we seek to live out the mission we share with Jesus. Amen.