

## John 15: 9-17

As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love. <sup>10</sup>If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. <sup>11</sup>I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete.

<sup>12</sup>"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup>No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. <sup>14</sup>You are my friends if you do what I command you. <sup>15</sup>I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. <sup>16</sup>You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. <sup>17</sup>I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

**Trinity Presbyterian Church**  
**May 6, 2018**  
**Older Adult Sunday**

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**“On the Brink of Everything...”**

“May my joy be in you and may your joy be complete.” says Jesus. [*author trans.*]

The video we just watched makes me weepy every time I see it. Older adults in a nursing home and young children in a preschool sharing precious life together. Some have eighty years ahead of them, others might not have eighty days. Yet, for a moment, age doesn't matter as they become playmates and maybe even friends. It is a picture of what I imagine the Holy Spirit had in mind when she first created the church.

Wrinkled hands on top of smooth hands.  
Calloused hands holding curious hands.  
Arthritic hands working with rainbow magic-marker hands.  
Hand in hand sharing the eternal gift of life.

The Zulu proverb at the beginning of the video said it best. “A person is a person because of people.” We form each other. The hands of our humanity leave fingerprints on each other's lives. Who I am today is far different than the person you knew when I first came here four years ago because of you. My guess is who you are is also different than who you were four years ago. Research shows that moments we share regardless of our age aren't arbitrary. When an eighty-year old and a six-year old come down the church aisle together to light the candles of Christ, it is a moment that brings light to all of us. On Palm Sunday when the old and young marched around the sanctuary waving palm branches, afterward one of our children said, “I don't want to leave.” And to be honest, I didn't want to leave either—because the fun was rubbing off on both of us. These moments form us. A person is a person because of people. A person is a person because of relationships.

So think back to a meaningful relationship that formed who you are. What makes someone a “friend?” Tell me what made these relationships so meaningful? They saw you for who you were. They cared about your feelings. They were trustworthy. There was an easy connection. They listened to you and accepted you fully as you are. You held things in common.

It is interesting that Jesus uses the same language to describe his relationship to us. “No longer are you my servants, but my friends who love one another.” There is a difference between a servant and a friend, isn’t there? A servant serves, but a friend joins. A servant acts out of obligation, but a friend acts out of gratitude for the relationship. A servant lays down one’s life out of duty, a friend lays down one’s life out of love. Jesus says that no longer is there a one-way transaction where the master speaks and the servant obeys. Instead, we are to be friends who join Jesus because we know what God’s endgame is: to become a world where the hurting are cared for. To live in a way where each person is experienced as a peephole into God. To be a people who place their lives before each other; not as an act of servant duty, but as an act of friendship and love.

But here’s the tricky part: it's hard to love someone who we don’t really know. Friendships aren't always forged easily. Especially between those who are older and those who are younger. It is difficult to feel a connection with a teenager while she is tethered to her iPhone. It is nearly impossible for tired achy bones to keep up with young springy legs. Then there's the amount of pain that will greet us the next morning if we try. Not to mention what does a young person know about getting old anyways? They do not know what it is like for the landmarks that were once reliable to become unrecognizable. They have not felt the years clipping by in a hurry as if they were on a speedy conveyor belt. Nor do they understand what it means to attend more funerals in a year than weddings or graduations. It is hard for the young and the old to forge friendships these days, because really, what do they have in common?

Yet, when it comes to the church, to be in intergenerational relationship is the promise we all said yes to when we dribbled water over our children at their baptism. We said we will invest in them and their parents to raise them in the faith. But it can be difficult sometimes. It is much easier to hire a Director of Christian Education or a Youth Director to do it for us, then it is to chip away at forming the relationship ourselves. But that isn’t the promise we made to them. Maybe it is because we are intimidated by the generational gap, but I think it runs deeper. Perhaps, the deeper issue is that those of us who are older aren't confident about what we have to offer the world anymore.

So I would like to share a word with the older adults in the room: You are amazing people. It’s not you *were* amazing people, but you *are*. Not only have you laid the foundation for what our church is, but you've endured trials and tribulations, you've faced life’s scares and shared tears. Some of you have become caregivers for your spouses as their health has declined—and it has been anything but easy. Some of you have buried your life partners, others have buried their children. All the while still proclaiming that God has been good and faithful. How do you do that? You are a living witness to the love of God, and your faith is something that shapes all of us, today. In Jane Fonda’s TED talk on aging, which is almost as popular as her 1980’s exercise VHS tapes, she says that our society treats getting older like an arc. We climb up the hill of our youth, stand at the top somewhere around 40 or 50, and then it is a downhill fall from there.

But what society fails to take into account, she says, is the resiliency of the human spirit. The human spirit is like a ramp that can keep growing stronger and wiser even as our bodies become weaker and our minds forgetful. As we endure and reflect on our life experiences, the human spirit has the opportunity to keep climbing higher and higher as it soars off the ramp. You, my friends, are ramp people. And to watch God working in you even in the midst of life's challenges and limitations testifies to the true strength of the human spirit. As a parent and a pastor, you have much to offer all of us. You have much to offer me. You have much to offer our children, today.

You should know that after a beloved member of our church died, a child asked her mother, "Who was that who died?" As a response the mother told me that she never wants someone here to die and her child not know who they are. And then around the same time an older adult shared that he was making it his "ministerial goal for the year" to learn all of the children's names—all twenty-five of them. I remember thinking to myself, I think we are on the brink of becoming an intergenerational community. Perhaps even a picture of what the Holy Spirit had in mind when she first created the church.

So let's make every Sunday an Older Adult Sunday. Let's make every Sunday a Youth Sunday. Let's make every Sunday a Radical Welcome Sunday. Let's make every Sunday, are you ready for this: a Holy-Moly-The-Spirit-of-God-Is-Showing-Up-To-Remind-Us-That-No-Matter-Our-Age-Or-Gender, Our-Limitations-Or-Situations, Our-Orientation-Or-Identifications-We-Are-All-Created-In-The-Image-of-God-And-Have-Gifts-of-Love-to-Share-With-Each-Other-Sunday.

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Amen.