

Sermon on the Fifth Sunday of Easter and  
Bring a Friend to Church Sunday  
St. James Episcopal Church  
San Francisco, California  
May 6, 2007  
by The Rev. Mary Moore Gaines

Exodus 33: 7-11a; Psalm 84; I Corinthians 13:1-13; John 15:12-17

*When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance to the tent, and the Lord would speak with Moses . . . . Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend.*  
Exodus 33

*Jesus said to his disciples, "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends . . . . You did not choose me but I chose you.*  
John 15:12-13

Today we continue to celebrate Earth Month here at St. James, and on this special Sunday we celebrate our friends with "Bring a friend to St. James Sunday." We welcome all this morning, especially friends, and those who have invited friends.

As you may notice, the readings and the music have been chosen especially to affirm our recognition and appreciation of the sacredness of friends and friendship. However, as far as I know, we are not singing that wonderful country and western hymn, *What a friend we have in Jesus*. Too bad!

Many of us long to be like Moses, speaking to God *face to face, as one speaks to a friend*. We yearn for friendship with God. While we don't believe that God is a grand old man with a long grey beard, living up in heaven, and distantly related to the Queen, we do want, even demand, a personal relationship with God. This is what makes those of us in the Judeo/Christian tradition different from our Eastern seeker friends. We want, even demand, a personal relationship with God.

We live with and enjoy the wonderful stories of God as person, knowing all the while that God is much, much different from a human person. We understand God as the heart of the mystery in which we are all involved. In our scripture, there are many ways to describe God – pillar of cloud, earthquake, wind, fire, still, small voice. God, however, is probably best identified as a verb. God is the 'ising,' the energy, of the universe. God is love and love is a verb. Neither a dozen red roses, nor a diamond ring, love is made real in loving and in our experience of being loved.

In the familiar reading from I Corinthians, Paul reminds us that *faith, hope and love abide, but the greatest of these is love*. On reflection, it seems that it is impossible to sustain either faith or hope without love.

Love has been approached in many ways through the centuries, in story and song, in word and deed. C.S. Lewis, the quintessential old school British bachelor, was a prolific and imaginative writer. He wrote about life, especially Christian Life. He wrote children's books and fiction. In late middle age, this confirmed bachelor fell in love with and married a woman named Helen Joy. Helen Joy died a few years later. In his book, *A Grief Observed*, Lewis describes their relationship of deep romantic love and friendship.

In his classic *The Four Loves*, Lewis writes about each of four loves. Love of family, *familias*; romantic love, *eros*; friendship, *amicas*; and Divine Love, *agape*. Lewis extols friendship as the one love between human beings that is freely chosen, not genetically or emotionally based. Friendship often happens when there is an affinity of values, interests, likes and dislikes.

Lewis notes that "Lovers are always talking to one another about their love; Friends hardly ever about their friendship. Lovers are normally face to face, absorbed in each other; Friends, side by side, absorbed in some common interest. Eros is necessarily between two only. But two, far from being the necessary number for Friendship, is not even the best."

"True friendship," Lewis observes, "is the least jealous of all loves. Two friends delight to be joined by a third and three by a fourth . . ."

Then Lewis gives us a glimpse of his vision of friends in paradise. "They [Friends] can then say, as the blessed souls say in Dante, 'Here comes one who will augment our loves.' For in this love 'to divide is not to take away.'

And so here on earth. The more we share the love of one another between us, the more we shall all have.

In his book *A Different Drum*, Scott Peck wrote about what he called *true community*. True community is what we strive for, what we have, and what is always a work in progress, at St. James. We are gathered around God, the sacred, in and with Jesus the Christ, through his birth, death and resurrection, in his life and teachings. The truth we seek is in the story of Jesus, who teaches us many things, including and especially that the way to deep peace in every aspect of our lives is the way of nonviolence.

We try our best to practice radical inclusivity, that is, everyone welcome and warmly invited to the table. We do our best to love God and to love one another. We understand that to love someone often has to do with justice. That is, distributive and restorative justice, NOT retributive justice.

We try our best to practice what we preach and to make our community here at St. James a safe place in every way. We want everyone to have a voice and to speak up, be heard and respected. Decisions about our common life are made by the congregation in open and full discussion. There are no secrets.

In this Earth Month, we are coming to realize in new ways that to love God means to love God's creation, to take care of 'this fragile earth, our island home.' This is adding richness and a new sense of ourselves as true stewards of God's creation in basic, practical and doable ways.

What we do here at St. James. We worship, that is 'give worth to,' pay attention to God. We love, take care of, one another in this community. And we reach out to welcome and to serve our neighbors, near and far. The gift of hospitality is a wonderful spiritual gift that we treasure and cultivate. Hospitality is in our bones here at St. James. Celebrating is what we like most and do best.

On our campus here, in addition to St. James Church, we have the St. James Preschool in its 44<sup>th</sup> year, first a program, and now a partner, of St. James. We have our newest partner, the Community Learning Center at St. James, which offers programs for children, youth, adults and seniors in the Richmond District and beyond. Both of our partners are separate non-profits. Both are non-denominational serving people of all faiths and traditions. St. James is truly a new way of being church in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In my letter on the first page of the Prospectus for the new Community Center at St. James, I wrote, *Communities just don't happen. We create them by connecting with each other for the greater good of the whole. Active communities working together make healthy cities, healthy countries, a healthy world.*

So welcome friends. Come back soon and often. Join us on this amazing journey of life as 'people of the more.' That is, people who realize that there is more to life than what we can grasp with our five senses. That we are involved in a beautiful and sacred mystery which we honor to in every aspect of our lives.

Jesus says, "You did not choose me but I chose you." Fascinating idea isn't it? Shall we, do we, accept Jesus' invitation to love God, to love one another, and to follow him?