

Red Door Chronicle



A newsletter of Saint Andrew's Presbyterian Church

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CHRISTMAS & GOD'S GIFT OF FRIENDSHIP



Sometimes in our lives, we all have pain,” wrote the late singer-songwriter Bill Withers, in 1972, rather famously. “We all have sorrow. So please swallow your pride, if I have things you need to borrow: for no one can fill those of your needs, that you won’t let show. You just call on me, brother, when you need a hand. We all need

somebody to lean on. So lean on me, when you’re not strong and I’ll be your friend. I’ll help you carry on: for it won’t be long till I’m gonna need somebody to lean on.”

Friendship, however, is on the wane in the world in which we live. Friendship, and a sense of family. And loneliness, often deep loneliness, is on the rise. In fact, loneliness is now regarded as one of the greatest mental health challenges we now face as a society.

“Thanks to remarkable new technologies and the widespread use of social media,”

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wrote Claire Pomeroy in *Scientific American*, in 2019, “we are more “connected” than ever before . . . Yet as a nation, we are also more lonely. In fact, a recent study found that a staggering 47% of North Americans often feel alone, left out. and lacking meaningful connection with others . . . This is true for all ages, from teenagers to older adults. The number of people who perceive themselves to be alone, isolated or distant from others has reached epidemic levels, both in the United States, and in other parts of the world.”

Isn't that extraordinary?

And the pandemic hasn't helped. Almost half of Americans surveyed about this matter since 2020 have reported losing touch with some of their friends over the past 12 months. Even young women, ordinarily among the keenest makers (and keepers) of friends, report the same, 6% of women ages 18-29 indicating that they had lost touch with “most” of their friends during the pandemic. Not some, but most. As Tom Greene put it, “Thelma has now lost her Louise.”

I suspect friendship was on the wane in ‘Old Israel,’ too, especially in the so-called Silent Years, i.e. the roughly 400 years that comprise the strange and

deeply mysterious period between the Old and New Testaments.

Israel had been worn to a frazzle from war and exile, and hope itself had died. There was talk of a Coming One, a “Messiah,” even the Son of David. But everything had gone cold in the meantime: cold, and silent. And when the earth, and its peoples, grow cold, most people simply “pull in.” In a word, they “turtle,” and friendships die.

Friendship, actually, is one of the most extraordinary gifts of the Kingdom of God. It is like a “golden thread” which ties all hearts together (John Evelyn). Moreover, friendship is like a “sheltering tree” (Samuel Taylor Coleridge), a tree in whose shade many may take comfort. It ministers grace and healing, and binds up the brokenhearted (Isaiah 61). Not only this, but friendship by the Spirit of God sets the lonely in families (Psalm 68). It brings profound richness to the soul and ministers both purpose and perspective; iron, as it were, sharpening iron (Proverbs 27:17). Indeed, a friendship “makes real what we already believe” (John Fisher) and builds the extraordinary community we now call the “church.” The New Testament writers called this divine phenomenon *koinonia*, rendered ‘fellowship’ in

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many translations of the New Testament, though the word is much, much deeper than that, both in Greek and in English.

And so when God was made man on the cusp of a whole new Testament—the *New Testament*—one of the first things to awaken again to life was in fact friendship! Yes. And so it was with two of the most extraordinary ladies in the history of salvation, Mary of Nazareth, and Elizabeth of Ein Karem, wife of Zachariah (see Luke 1:39-45).

Needless to say, in spite of the fact that Elizabeth was much older than Mary, they had much in common. They were kinswomen, the Bible tells us, and may have met before. Indeed, they were both expecting children. And they had both been swept up in something far greater than themselves.

We know that when Mary greeted Elizabeth, the latter's baby actually "leapt in her womb." We know that Elizabeth was then filled with the Holy Spirit, as it were spontaneously, and made a (now-famous) prophetic utterance: *"Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord."* But beyond that, we have no idea what they talked about.

In the end, Mary stayed with Elizabeth for three months. And I suspect the impact Elizabeth had on Mary was profound! By the Spirit of God, Elizabeth gave Mary the strength to carry on, —she really did—not only to the end of her pregnancy, but to all the challenges that lay beyond. I suspect they not only talked together, and walked together, but also prayed together, and poured out their hearts to each other without restraint, in love and support.

Ever had a friend like that? It's one of the greatest gifts one can ever receive from our generous God.

Once upon a time my mother had a friend by the name of Inez. She was the pastor's wife from the church across the street. And one day Inez came over for coffee, and sat in a reclining chair in our living room. Rev. Clifford and Inez were expecting their third child, and I have to admit it was the very first time I had ever seen a pregnant lady up close. I remember being astonished by how (frankly) big she was, in expectation of the child. I mean, what could one expect from a such naïve, non-worldly-wise twelve-year-old (for so I was), but astonishment? I'm sure I asked her some pretty ridiculous, even silly questions, like, "Wow, does that hurt?" Or

“Can you feel the baby move?” (At least until my mother sent me out of the room to find something else to do, other than irritating her company.)

Inez just smiled, of course, and was no doubt charmed. It was obvious that she and my mother really enjoyed their time together, not only sharing coffee, but more than a few shared experiences as moms and caregivers. My mother wasn’t a Christian at the time, but I am certain that Inez’ sharing of her faith no doubt played a significant part in my Mom’s later coming-to-faith, which took place a few years later.

After the child was born, a boy named Sterling, I asked Clifford and Inez if I could see the baby. (My mother would have been horrified if she knew how ‘intrusive’ I was being, as she would have put it.) But Clifford and Inez said yes, and I’ll never forget the experience. There he was, newborn Sterling, lying in the bassinet, sleeping soundly. I couldn’t believe how perfect he was, with everything in place (only in miniature). A perfect little face, perfect little hands, perfect little fingers. I mean, he even had perfect little fingernails . . . Sterling’s parents beamed with pride when they saw the expression of wonder on my face.

Friendship. Do you have any idea what it means in the Kingdom of God? “Be devoted to one another in love,” said Paul, “honouring one another above yourselves.” Moreover, “bear one another’s burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ.” To which Peter the Apostle adds, “love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.”

And what is the Law of Christ? The Law of Christ is love. And love—by way of friendship—is one of the greatest engines of the church. I see people loving one another all the time, here at St. Andrew’s, and elsewhere. I mean, really loving one another.

Only last week, for example, I heard about someone who is now unexpectedly living alone, whose family and children are all now far away. Moreover, he no longer drives, which as you know is especially tough in the winter. And do you know what I have also heard? That there is a man in this congregation who now goes to this person not ‘once in a blue moon,’ nor even ‘once in a while,’ but several times weekly. Among other things, he phones him all the time. He picks him up; he takes him out to shop for groceries; he seeks to bring him into the warmth of human company wherever

er and whenever he can. In a phrase, he “watches out” for him.

This man is a real friend. In fact he is a friend of friends. He is fulfilling the law of Christ in the most extraordinary way. And hearing about this, and thinking about this, has taken my breath away. This extraordinary servant of Christ is doing what Elizabeth did for Mary, at what could have been one of the darkest moments of Mary’s life.

“Be kind and merciful,” wrote Mother Teresa while she was still among us, “and let no one ever come to you without coming away better and happier. Be the living expression of God’s kindness: kindness in your face, kindness in your eyes, kindness in your

smile, kindness in your warm greeting. In the slums, we are the light of God’s kindness to the poor. To children, to the poor, to all who suffer and are lonely, give always a happy smile. Give them not only your care, but also your heart. There is a terrible hunger for love. We all experience that in our lives, the pain, the loneliness. We must have the courage to recognize it. The poor you may have right in your own family. Find them. Love them.”

This Christmas, make “friendship,” endowed by love, one of the gifts you give, in Jesus’ name. In fact make “friendship” the most sacred, the most generous gift you give, more than any other.

- Colin

Out of the mouths of God's kids!

★ A small boy told a Sunday school teacher: "When you die, God takes care of you like your parents did when you were alive — only God doesn't yell at you all the time." — *via Rev. Dennis R. Fakes, Lodi, CA*

★ A woman invited some people to dinner. At the table, she turned to her six-year-old daughter and said, "Would you like to say the blessing?" "I wouldn't know what to say," the little girl replied.

"Just say what you hear Mommy say," the mother said. The little girl bowed her head and said: "Dear Lord, why on earth did I invite all these people to dinner?" — *via Charles Laine, Franklin, TN*

★ A pastor was speaking to a group of second-graders about the resurrection of Jesus when one student asked, "What did Jesus say right after He came out of the grave?" The pastor explained that the Gospels do not tell us what He said. The hand of one little girl shot up. "I know what He said: He said, 'Tah-dah!'"



WHEN THE TIME HAD FULLY COME

by Bob Pushak

*But when the time had fully come, God sent His Son, born of a woman,
born under the law, to redeem those under the law,
that we might receive our adoption as sons.
And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of His Son
into our hearts, crying out, "Abba, Father!"*

Galatians 4:4-6

CHRISTMAS IS ABOUT THE INCARNATION. AT THE BIRTH OF JESUS, GOD WAS SOMEHOW breaking into and entering into the world of mankind. God, who is unlimited, experienced the limitations of human life.

The Incarnation is not something that just happened once a long, long time ago. It is still happening today. According to the above quote of scripture Paul indicates God is continually sending "the Spirit of his son into our hearts." So God is still breaking into and entering into world of mankind.



There are neurons in hearts that are the same in type and function as the neurons in our brains. Our hearts are connected to our brains via the vagus nerve and our heart and brain are constantly communicating with each other as we process thoughts and emotions. This brain-heart connection helps us to understand why the Bible views the heart as the seat of spiritual perception and why Jesus states that it is the "pure of heart" who see God (Matthew 5:8).

Purity of spirit is not about following all the rules perfectly because we are all limited and imperfect. Instead, Paul states this redemption comes through the "spirit of the son entering into our hearts."

When we pray our hearts cry out in longing to God "Abba, Father." The Greek word *Abba* is similar to our modern word "Daddy." We long for intimacy with our divine father, which is a longing for the comfort of our true spiritual home. According to Paul, this longing for God does not originate from us. This calling out for God comes from God, for it is the "Spirit of the Son" that is "sent into our hearts calling out Abba, Father." Prayer requires a lot of effort in the beginning learning to be still, learning to be silent, but over time we experience that it is no longer we who pray but it is the "Spirit of the Son" who is praying through us.

So, this Christmas as we participate in family and church traditions let us also seek out times of stillness and silence where we can experience the Incarnation breaking into

our hearts where the “deep calls out to deep,” (Psalm 42:7). So right here and right now can become the “time that has fully come.”

*What good is it, that Christ was born in a stable
in Bethlehem long ago if he is not also born today in me?*

Meister Eckhart



PRAYER REQUESTS

*BE ANXIOUS FOR NOTHING, BUT IN EVERYTHING BY PRAYER AND SUPPLICATION,
WITH THANKSGIVING, LET YOUR REQUESTS BE MADE KNOWN TO GOD. (PHILIPPIANS 4:6)*

GOD IS GOOD AND WE KEEP PRAYING! PLEASE PRAY:

- That God would comfort and bring peace to those who have recently lost a loved one. In our church family this would include Bill, Yurdle, Nikeisha, Ashlin, and especially Joan Vant Geloof, Rosemary Greer, Eric Pringle, Isobel Kay, Carol Hayhurst, Marion Blanchard, and Jan Higgins;
- That the holidays would be blessed & restful for all and kept free from accident and injury ;
- That God would grant us ongoing health into 2023;
- To give thanks for answered prayers regarding Fraser and Iza MacDonald's improved health;
- To give thanks for Anna Proudlock's continued well-being;
- To give thanks that the health of Justin, Debbie Norris's grandson-in-law, has improved, and he is now able to return to work;
- To give thanks for Carroll Moreland's recovery from the flu, thanks for those who prayed for her;
- To give thanks for Isobel Kay's recovery, after spending a month in hospital;
- To give thanks that Shawn, Pat Mesic's son, had a good outcome from his cardiac surgery; and to give thanks that Pat's daughter, Teresa, is also experiencing better health;
- To give thanks that Debbie Norris's daughter, Jolene, has found shelter;
- That Pat Mesic's heart surgery would be successful and that she would have a speedy recovery;
- That Marlene Lane would experience healing of a shoulder that continues to be extremely sore, two months following a Covid 19 shot. Also that she would be able to breathe with ease;
- That Ashlin Angel would be ready to go through detox and enter a two-year treatment program in the New Year; that Yurdle, her Mom, would experience God's peace;
- To give thanks for Terry Steward's little friend, Charlotte. Also, that Charlotte and her brother both recover from Covid; and that Ruby, their grandmother, recover from shingles;

- That Fraser and Iza MacDonald, and Isobel Kay, experience continuing health;
- That God who bring health to Iza's sister, Helen, who is suffering from cardiac issues;
- That Margaret Sisley would experience improved health;
- That there would be reconciliation among the members of Patrick Longworth's family; that God would grant his father renewed health; and that God would bless and protect the whole family;
- That Gwen Sulz would recover fully from Covid before Christmas;
- That Louise Thorpe's son-in-law, Greg, would have successful reconstructive surgery on his spine, which has been affected by cancer; that he could recover speedily and have minimal pain; that he and his wife Debbie would be given strength as they face this challenge;
- That Debbie Norris experience healing for her arm, which she has not been able to lift up since receiving a cortisone shot to help her with the pain;
- That God give strength to David Ure, and Sherry Ure, as she cares for David and leads the Board of the Pathways Addictions Resource Society;
- That Debbie Norris's daughter, Jolene, become well in mind and body;
- That Sharon Mayforth would find new friends in the Hamlets, as it is proving quite lonely there.
- That Kathleen Brown, and Sean, and Ian McKenzie find the Christmas season and its many traditions and ceremonies something which will bring them deep inner peace, and joy.
- That God would bring blessing to John Moss and keep him strong during difficult times;
- That God would bring rest and respite and the aid of helping folk to the homeless during this bitterly cold weather, and beyond;
- That God would bestow his presence and peace upon Sherry Ure's friend, Carol, who suffers from cerebral palsy;
- That Michaela's father Stefan, who lives in Bucharest, Romania, would receive good care from his caregivers and experience greater well-being through 2023;
- That God would give Wilma Huebert strength after being displaced from her condo by a devastating fire; and that the restoration of the building—and a return to her unit—(though it may be a long time) take place as expeditiously as possible;
- That Terry Stewart be given discernment as she considers selling her home;
- That God bless our Christmas Eve & Christmas Day services, and draw worshippers forth in spite of the cold;
- That God give Bob Pushak safety as he travels in the New Year to see a pain specialist, and for the success of this consultation;
- That God guide the congregation of Penticton United Church as the dear folk there—our beloved brothers and sisters—seek to sell their building and reframe ministry;
- That God bring encouragement and uplift to Elaine Long's nephew, Darren; and that God also bless Elaine's grandnephew, Jared (Darren's son) with a new sense of hope and purpose.
- That God bless the interdenominational work of the Wise Elders among us, as they prepare a conference with the Rev. Dr. Ross Lockhardt here at St. Andrew's, in March of 2023.

