

Three friends were having lunch together; Jack Benny, George Burns and Edgar Bergen. If you remember, Jack Benny had a reputation for being a tightwad. George Burns always said he had a "reach impediment" when it came to picking up the bill, and was, therefore surprised to hear Benny ask for the check. On the way out Burns complimented Benny by saying, "*That was good of you to ask for the check.*" To which Benny replied, "*I did not ask for the check, and that's the last time I'll have lunch with a ventriloquist.*"

**According to Bits and Pieces:** a British publication once offered a prize for the best definition of a friend.

**Among the thousands of answers received were the following:** "One who multiplies joys, divides grief, and whose honesty is inviolable." "One who understands our silence." "A volume of sympathy bound in cloth." "A watch that beats true for all time and never runs down."

**The winning definition:** "*A friend is the one who comes in when the whole world has gone out.*"

**We all need friends, don't we? We need people we can trust and who can trust us.** We need people we can rely on and who can rely on us. We need people to hold accountable and to whom we are held accountable. **We need friends.** I think that's why one of the all-time most watched comedies was Friends. It ran for ten seasons and through every idiotic situation, through every successful and failed relationship or job they stuck together. They were there for each other. Yes, they fought. Yes, they argued. Yes, they disagreed and got angry. But they hung together because they were friends and we all need that kind of relationship in our lives.

**In my life I'd say I've had quite a few friends.** Pastors get to meet lots of people and be their friends. And in the ministry, in college and seminary I've been close friends with a lot of people. **But there are three friendships which stand out as being formative and defining.**

**First, there was my Mom's Father...we called him Papa.** His real name was Victor Koepplin, the son of a Lutheran Pastor.

**When I was young, Victor Koepplin, Alias Papa-Grandpa,** my Mother's Father, and I worked side by side in his back yard a lot. Often time we had opportunity to discuss the faith and while we didn't always agree, we both knew the other believed deeply. I also knew if Grandpa said he was going to pray about something, it meant he was really going to pray and he expected an answer—that was the German in him. Papa helped form my Christian life and practices through his own life. **Even though he was an old man to me, he was my friend, because he listened to me.**

**Second, there was the Pastor of my youth--Lloyd Bus @ Abiding Presence Lutheran Church.** In Pastor Bus I found a spiritual father and friend. When we first met when I was 10, I knew there was something special about him and I also knew I wanted to get to know him more. And I did. He was my pastor when I accepted Christ. He confirmed me. He was the one who, when I was struggling with my faith in high school was there to listen and challenge. Obviously, the journeys of life, pulled us apart from one another, but I believe in the spirit we stayed connected. When I decided to go to seminary I wrote him a letter and thanked him for his influence on my life when I was growing in my faith. Today I find it interesting that the first Pastor I remember, who probably had the most influence on me, stayed at the same congregation his entire call. I remember Lloyd as one who loved the Gospel, one who modeled what preaching should be like, lively, engaging and challenging. **Yes, he was my friend.**

**And then there was a friend I met at seminary.** A friend who believed like I believed when it came to God. A friend who thought the way that I did when it came to the world. A friend who felt things the way I felt them. When we intertwined our thoughts, feelings and ideas, we realize we had found a safe place, and it was an easy place to share, an easy place to mull over new ideas, an easy place to argue about our faith knowing that if we disagreed we wouldn't be rejected. Yes, it was here we both had found a formative and defining friend. And today, 35 years later, that friendship is still alive and in place because of Jesus and his word.

**Listen to how Jesus describes that relationship-our Friendship with him. Read John 15:9-17**

**Did you hear that? "I no longer call you servants...now I call you friends." Vs. 15.**

**I don't know how many times I had read that passage before it really sank in.**

You see, I grew up in house where there wasn't a lot of love expressed. Especially for me. Early on in my life there was a lot of drinking going on among the nurturing adult who were caring for me, therefore they were "NUMB" and unable to show me love the way many other households showed "love."

However, in my teen years, though youth group and other friend's families, I learned that it is O.K. to express your LOVE for others. Because of my bold personality, I was willing to take a step out, willing to try and show my parents the love they couldn't show. **And it worked—they returned that LOVE TO ME. OH, THAT HIPPIE GENERATION REACHING OUT TO THE staunch German Generation. I realize they yearned for that love. AND BECAUSE OF THAT, THEY STARTED SHOWING IT BACK TO ME, MY BROTHER AND ONE ANOTHER.**

And because of that love I became one of the most willing servants Jesus ever found. And I would have been happy just being a servant in the house of the Lord for the rest of my days.

**But then one day I heard this verse again. It was like God grabbed me by the collar and said: "JAN, you need to look at this and you need to listen. Do you hear that? Do you hear that? That promise is for you."**

And to be honest, I couldn't believe it. I knew Jesus wanted me to be His servant. I knew Jesus wanted me to be His Disciple. I knew Jesus wanted me to share his WORD with others. **But I didn't know Jesus wanted me to be His Friend.** That thought had never crossed my mind. **But there it is.**

**"Jan, I no longer call you servant.... now I call you friend."** \_\_\_\_\_, I no longer call you servant.... now I call you friend."

**"I no longer call you servant.... now I call you friend."** So, what? What's In A Name? What difference does it make whether we're called Servants or Friends?

Well, it impacts how we look at ourselves and how we respond to the relationship God offers us through Christ. **Let's compare the roles and how servants and friends react and respond.**

A servant is told his worth by his pay.

A friend is invited into a priceless relationship.

A servant is told only what they need to know.

A friend is invited to share in plans, ideas, and privileged info.

A servant is told only what to do.

A friend is invited to discuss what needs to be done.

A servant is told not to speak unless spoken to.

A friend is invited to share in the conversation.

A servant is told to wait on the table.

A friend is invited to sit at the table and share in the meal.

**Servants and friends have different roles.** And while I'd be glad to be nothing more than a servant in the house of God, Jesus says, **"I no longer call you servant...now I call you friend."**

**The remarkable thing about this friendship, this love that's offered by Jesus, is that it begins with God.** It is unmerited, unconditional and unearned love. Jesus chooses us as His friend. He said, ***"I chose you: you did not choose me."***

**We've been chosen to be a friend of Jesus, but it's our choice whether we accept that relationship or not.** We can remain servants if we want to. But why would we want to be a servant when we can be a friend. I can't begin to describe how completely awesome and humbling that is all rolled into one. The Son of God wants us, wants ME, wants YOU for His friend. It's almost too much to wrap this feeble brain of mine around. And while my mind may not be able to comprehend it, my heart has no trouble at all wrapping itself around it.

But I have to warn you. This is a risky relationship. When we accept this relationship, it confronts us and challenges us. It confronts us with the knowledge that while our friend Jesus promises to accompany us wherever we go, **this is a mutual relationship.** And in mutual relationships, sometimes, a lot of times, a friend invite, encourage, lead, insist that we accompany them to places we've never been before.

**And this relationship challenges us to love others in the same way because the love of Christ, the teachings of Christ, the compassion of Christ, the grace of Christ are needed more today than ever before.** Not too long before she died, Mother Teresa spoke at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, D.C. She was introduced to that gathering as **"the greatest woman in the world."** But when she stood up to speak she completely dismissed that introduction by saying that if she were the greatest woman in the world, you'd think that God would've made her tall enough to see over the podium behind which she was standing. But she went on to say, "I am nothing close to being the greatest woman in the world, but I will tell you the greatest thing about my life. **I've been able to be a "tiny pencil in the hand of God, someone through whom God writes love letters to the world."**

**When we accept Jesus as our Savior, when we accept and step into the friendship Jesus offers, each and every one of us becomes a tiny pencil through which God can write love letters to the world.**

And that's my challenge to each of us TODAY. Realize you are a "TINY PENCIL" who is in the Hands of God, and with you, God is writing Love Letters in the World. Knowing that, invite Jesus your Friend along with you on your journey into whatever future you have planned for yourself. Walk side by side with Him and let Him lead you so that you can be a tiny pencil in the hand of God. **Someone through whom others can experience the love of God through the love letter of your life.**

In one of his books, theologian Leslie Weatherhead says that **the Gospel can be put in six simple words.** He writes: "I suppose to some that Christianity may seem a complicated thing. There are so many sects and creeds and theologies. Believe me, I am being very serious when I say that it can all be summarized in 6 words: ***Jesus offers his friendship to you.***"

Our Lord and Savior, Jesus the Christ wants to offer that same friendship to you.

What's in A Name? As you leave this place this morning to go back into the world; as you leave this place this morning to begin a new phase in your life and your future listen to what Jesus has to say to you: **"I NO LONGER CALL YOU "SERVANT" -- I NOW CALL YOU FRIEND!!!"**

**Please allow your life to be as FULL as it can be. HOW?**

***Be a "tiny pencil in the hand of God, someone through whom God writes love letters to the world." Amen.***