

(slide Summer of Love)

Welcome to the Summer of LOVE! It's going to be groovy!

All kidding aside, welcome to a wonderful four-week opportunity to love. An opportunity to be specific, intentional, creative and lavish in extending love to our friends, family, this faith community, and even back to God.

And you don't have to become a hippie to do it!

I didn't grow up in the hippie generation. Everything I have learned about the 60's is second hand. Bell-bottoms, flower power, tie dye and crazy colorful outfits, and the music. I love a lot of the music from that time.

Many of you know the 60's better than I do because you lived it, it was a generation typified by being counter-culture, going against the flow.

(Slide of going against the low)

As Christians, followers of Jesus; we are often considered counterculture and going against the flow.

Partly because we realize we do not exist solely for ourselves. We realize that God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are real. And God calls us and empowers us to love others in radical and sacrificial ways.

We forgive as deeply as we have been hurt, we pray for others, we spend time with others desiring their best in all circumstances, using our strength to lift up the weary.

That is not really the wisdom or way of this world. That is not how this world necessarily flows. The conventional wisdom is more like **“Look out for number one!”** The world asks, **“What do I get out of it?”** The world’s mantra is **“Do what feels good.”**

(Slide of friendship)

Today’s focus is on friendship. And friendship is the foundation of every good relationship. With a spouse, parent, sibling, co-workers, in church...friendship is key.

But friendship can be a bit hard to describe completely.

Friends make you feel good about yourself, yes. But friends, well my friends, also laugh when you trip AND then help you up.

Friends will laugh WITH you at your most embarrassing moments. Friends increase joy and lighten the load of sadness.

Certainly, a friend is someone who enjoys doing some of the same things together, celebrating the good times...achievements at work, children being born, dreams coming true.

And friends are there in the hard times...sickness, work stress, the grief and loss of a loved one.

They are there for the long haul.

Friends make life worth living. Powerful expressions of God’s love and some of God’s best blessings in life.

(Slide of Bemidji State U)

I had a good friend named Jen. We met in college at Bemidji State University, in InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. And we enjoyed each other so much.

(Slide of Risk)

We laughed a lot, played boardgames like Risk, traveled to Ireland together and it turned into 9/11.

We had many adventures together.

But after college, we drifted apart. One night she called around 3 am to ask for my help with her car. It had mysteriously conked out somewhere in Minneapolis. She worked a night job. But I was working a day job.

Well, I ended up not helping her like she wanted me to. I asked her to call her dad. He would know about cars and towing and how to find her at night in the middle of Minneapolis.

She was safe but disappointed in me. I had let her down.

Our friendship took a hit that night. About 7 or 8 years later, her health began to decline. She discovered she had a hole in her heart and had probably been born with it. We reconnected and our friendship deepened.

But we were on borrowed time, maybe a couple more years together. Before she passed, she asked me to do the funeral and the eulogy. In my grief I could only manage the eulogy. The eulogy rang true because I KNEW Jen, and she KNEW me, we were close friends.

Somehow, she found a way to get over her disappointment. I believe God gave her strength to forgive. She showed me a part of God's love that I will forever cherish. Can't wait to see her again, we are still friends after all.

(Slide of two friends/coffee)

Maybe you have had those kinds of friends too. Friends that forgave and continued to love in the hard times. We all make mistakes in our relationships. Friendships are not easy.

I think we'd all agree that forming and nurturing friendships is difficult at times. Holding on to our friends requires effort and forgiveness occasionally.

(slide of Jesus and Peter)

That's what Jesus is doing here, rebuilding friendships and bonds. They had all gone through a tough time...Jesus' arrest and crucifixion. Rising from the dead was hard for the disciples to fathom.

(Slide of fishing)

So, Jesus invites his friends to an abundant catch of fish, an intimate meal, and to a painful but redemptive conversation.

It's early dawn, still not recognized by his disciples, Jesus instructs them to throw the net over the right side. And they bring in a huge haul. This achieves Jesus' goal of proving who he is, reminding them he will always provide abundantly.

It served to jog John's memory of Jesus doing the exact same thing at the beginning of Jesus' ministry. In delightful recognition, John understands and exclaims, **"It is the Lord!"**

Peter being Peter, jumps overboard and swims to shore to be with Jesus!

(Slide of Jesus and Peter)

Which then begins this powerful encounter displaying love, friendship, and forgiveness. As we see the Lord meets Peter where Peter is. Jesus' goes to Galilee, to the beach before dawn, prepares a meal, waits for them to come back from fishing.

Peter is not in the church or a synagogue. In love, Jesus seeks out Peter. He doesn't make Peter come to him. Except for a small bit of swimming - which is so Peter.

Teaching us, we too are to meet others where they are. If they are not in church, we go track them down.

But the best part for Peter is coming, this encounter is so very poignant even if it was a bit uncomfortable. In the gospel of John, we remember Peter denies Jesus 3 times. Denies being a follower or a friend of Jesus, deserted him the night before Jesus' crucifixion.

And then over a meal of fish and bread Jesus prepared for them, in maybe Jesus' and Peter's first semi-private conversation (cuz a few disciples are listening in). Here is their first semi-private conversation since that dreadful night.

The other disciples are watching this tennis match conversation, this kind of back and forth, volley and serve...Jesus asks Peter, **“Do you love me?”** and Peter sends back, **“Lord, you know I love you deeply as a friend.”**

Again, “Do you love me?” And again, Peter answers, **“Lord, you know that I do.”**

The third time Jesus asks, **“Peter do you really love me deeply as a friend?”** Peter is hurt and likely deeply embarrassed by his previous denial of Jesus, but responds, **“Lord you know all things and you know now that I love you deeply as a friend.”**

This is the best part for Peter because Jesus is simultaneously restoring Peter to full friendship. And Jesus is calling Peter deeper into his friendship with Jesus, deeper ministry responsibilities. With Jesus then saying to Peter, **“Feed my sheep.”**

In keeping this real, this interplay between Jesus and Peter...is a profound experience of redemptive friendship, of friendships that transform us.

Those times when we are often changed by people offering us deeper levels of love than we at the time are capable of giving back. We are impacted and changed by their ability to give us grace and love.

Can you remember those friends over your lifetime, or in your life right now?

A short time earlier, Peter had been devastated by his denial of Jesus, he ran off and wept bitterly. It wouldn't be too much of a stretch to say that Peter still felt deeply embarrassed.

Or that he felt his failure keenly, and had some heavy emotions like maybe shame and regret. Dread when he thought about Jesus and how he had screwed up their friendship.

Jesus knew Peter needed some extra help. Peter needed something a bit extra to believe he had been forgiven. Help to believe Jesus still valued Peter and their friendship.

So, Jesus shows Peter mercy, grace, and forgiveness. Through repetition and pointed questions, Jesus releases Peter from all past baggage.

Maybe the other disciples, listening in, needed to see and hear Jesus too. They also deserted Jesus in his hour of need. Maybe we need to hear Jesus saying this to us.

I've been thinking a lot about my friendships this past week. Those who have stuck by me. Noticing some of my friendships need tending and nurturing.

How about you, when have you experienced a time when you had to deal with your own failure in a relationship? Or has there been a friendship in your life that has changed you, made you a better person?

I have sensed God's encouragement and support all week as I've thought about my friends. And the Lord has been reminding me of the rich friendship we share. How Jesus' friendship with me, makes me a better friend to others. Jesus shows me how to love, forgive, seek others out.

(Slide of Jesus is my friend)

But sometimes it's hard to believe that Jesus wants to be my friend. Even though I know in John 15 Jesus calls us his friends. Sometimes it's hard to believe it.

So, I thought if you struggle a bit like me, struggle a bit with believing Jesus is your friend, that I could leave you with this song I've been listening to all week.

First, can you name this tune? Laurie, could you play a little of that song?

Anyone, yes... You've Got a Friend in Me, by Randy Newman! From the Toy Story movies, great song affirming friendship.

(slide of Toy Story)

As I read the lyrics, imagine Jesus saying them to you...

*You've got a friend in me
You've got a friend in me
When the road looks rough ahead
And you're miles and miles from your nice warm bed*

*You just remember what your old pal said
You've got a friend in me*

*Yeah, you've got a friend in me
You've got a friend in me
You've got a friend in me
You've got troubles, and I've got 'em, too
There isn't anything I wouldn't do for you
We stick together and we see it through
'Cause you've got a friend in me*

*You've got a friend in me
Some other folks might be a little bit smarter than I am
Bigger and stronger too, maybe
But none of them will ever love you the way I do
It's me and you,*

*And as the years go by
Our friendship will never die
You're gonna see, it's our destiny
You've got a friend in me
You've got a friend in me
You've got a friend in me*

As we reflect for a few moments, consider the good friends the Lord has given you. Pick one friend, and commit to letting them know this week how much you value their friendship.

Reaffirm they've got a friend in you.