

February 28, 2016 – Third Sunday of Lent
The God We Worship: Friendship with God
2 Chronicles 20:6-12

He prayed, "O LORD, God of our ancestors, you alone are the God who is in heaven. You are ruler of all the kingdoms of the earth. You are powerful and mighty; no one can stand against you! O our God, did you not drive out those who lived in this land when your people Israel arrived? And did you not give this land forever to the descendants of your friend Abraham? Your people settled here and built this Temple to honor your name. They said, 'Whenever we are faced with any calamity such as war, plague, or famine, we can come to stand in your presence before this Temple where your name is honored. We can cry out to you to save us, and you will hear us and rescue us.'

"And now see what the armies of Ammon, Moab, and Mount Seir are doing. You would not let our ancestors invade those nations when Israel left Egypt, so they went around them and did not destroy them. Now see how they reward us! For they have come to throw us out of your land, which you gave us as an inheritance. O our God, won't you stop them? We are powerless against this mighty army that is about to attack us. We do not know what to do, but we are looking to you for help."

Today is the Third Sunday of Lent. Lent is a 40-day journey from Ash Wednesday to Easter Sunday. The 40 day of Lent is excluding Sundays - on Sundays we worship and praise God in mini-Easter celebrations. Lent is a time designated by the church for reflection, preparation, and repentance. During Lent we are preparing ourselves to fully celebrate Christ's death and Resurrection. We are using the disciplines of fasting, prayer, silence, meditation, Bible reading all for the purpose of drawing closer to God.

Imagine if we all joined in on this 40-day journey
Imagine if we all prepared our hearts to fully accept the gift of grace on Easter morning.
Imagine if we all simply asked God to help us experience an awakening over the next 40 days that would lead us to fully accepting His gift.
Imagine if we all asked that He consume our lives with His presence and His will
Imagine if we all woke up Easter morning ready to experience His love in an amazing new way.
Imagine singing to the Lord a little louder Easter Morning.

During Advent we remember that God became human and lived among us in the person of Jesus the Christ. He was called Immanuel which means, God with us.

During Lent we remember why He came. The sinless Jesus became sin for us and was sacrificed on a cross, died and three days later rose from the dead taking away the power of sin so that we could have a personal relationship with God.

There are three things that I've learned: There is a God and I'm not Him, but I can know Him. When we know God we can worship God sincerely or truly.

D. Martyn Lloyd – Jones wrote that the object of the Bible "is that we may know God

and worship Him more truly. And that is really our reason for considering this great doctrine of God, because unless we do understand what the Bible tells us about God, our worship can never be real.”

Jesus said to the Samaritan woman, “You worship what you do not know” (John 4:22). May that never be said of us.

Our text for today from 2 Chronicles chapter 20 is a prayer.

2 Chronicles 20:6

He prayed, "O LORD, God of our ancestors, you alone are the God who is in heaven. You are ruler of all the kingdoms of the earth. You are powerful and mighty; no one can stand against you!

The prayer begins by acknowledging the One, true God. If He alone is God then He is God of all people. He is for all people and sovereign over all. He is Ruler of all the earth. He is powerful and mighty, no one can stand against Him. Pastor Nick spoke about this a few weeks ago, the Lord is our transcendent, holy, majestic God. He is so much greater than us, so much “other” than us – do you know what I mean? No one can compare to Him.

Yet, remarkably and beyond my comprehension, He has chosen to commit Himself to us. He even cares for us when we don’t care about Him.

Romans 5:8

But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners.

The next three words of the prayer that is our text for today says (v7b), “O *our* God...” The word that stands out to me here is that little word, “our.” That little word implies a relationship. Pastor John talked about that last week.

Jesus came from his lofty place in heaven to save us so that we could be His people and He could be our God. Our God is a personal God and knowing God in a personal way is the highest level of Immanuel or God with us. And He can be and should be, and you should be able to say that He is, not only God with us, but God with *me*. That is His ultimate goal: to be an intimate friend to each of us.

One Spring afternoon, I came home to find two little girls on the steps of my building. Both were crying hard, shedding big tears.

Thinking they might be hurt, I dropped my briefcase and quickly went over to them. "Are you all right?" I asked.

Still sobbing, one held up her doll. "My baby's arm came off," she said.

I took the doll and its disjointed arm. After a little effort and luck, the doll was again whole.

"Thank you." came a whisper.

Next looking into the tearful eyes of her friend, I asked, "and what's the matter with you, young lady?"

She wiped her cheeks. "I was helping her cry," she said.

That is what friends do, they help us, they help us laugh and they help us cry. Let's look at our prayer again...

2 Chronicles 20:9, 12b

'Whenever we are faced with any calamity such as war, plague, or famine, we can come to stand in your presence before this Temple where your name is honored. We can cry out to you to save us, and you will hear us and rescue us.' ...We do not know what to do, but we are looking to you for help."

God wants to be involved with every area and every detail of your life. Friendship with God is biblical and our having friendship with God is His idea. God is the one who initiates His friendship with us.

There are two names for God in the Bible. One is *Elohim* this is the powerful, Almighty God. The other name for God is *Yahweh* this is the relational, promise-keeping God.

This is a good balance and a healthy way for us to think of the friendship with God. He is not our buddy in the sky, who lets us do anything we want; He is *Elohim* worthy of our deep reverence and obedience. At the same time, we can enjoy His intimate fellowship because He is *Yahweh* who reveals His personality to us and wants us to get to know Him.

The most important and most reliable revelation of God comes by way of Jesus. We learn about friendship with a holy God from Jesus. Only a few days before His crucifixion Jesus called His disciples His friends and said,

John 15:13

There is no greater love than to lay down one's life for one's friends.

True friends will support one another and sacrifice for each another. They are dependable, always there when needed. A true friend would die for you. This is what Jesus did for us, He laid down His life for His friends. He proved His love for us, His friendship, by dying for us.

Now skip down to John 15:16b:

You didn't choose me. I chose you.

Who chose whom? We didn't choose Him, He chose us. In other words, Jesus initiated this friendship.

We do not make friends with God; God makes friends with us, bringing us to know Him by making His love known to us
- J.I. Packer, *Knowing God*

Religion is man reaching up to God, Christianity is God reaching down to man. We do not seek God, God seeks us; we didn't first love God, God loved us and sent His Son, Jesus to die for us as evidence of His love.

This is how we know God want a relationship with us, because He came down to be God with us in Jesus. He has loved us, and has been merciful to us, and faithful to us and He wants us to be holy because He is holy. Holy means set apart – we are to no longer be molded by the world but be set apart for God alone. Jesus is our Savior, our Lord, and our Friend.

When we accept Jesus Christ as our Savior we become children of God. But, while we are always children of God adopted into His family by faith, we are not always friends of God. Why is this? This is because we do not always make Him Lord of our life. We are not always friends of God because friendship with God is based on our present obedience.

How do I know that? Jesus said it:

John 15:14
You are my friends *if* you do what I command.

In verse 7 of the prayer which is our text for today we read:

2 Chronicles 20:7
O our God ...did you not give this land forever to the descendants of your friend Abraham?

Abraham is referred to as a friend of God. God Himself called Abraham His friend.

Isaiah 41:8
"But as for you, Israel my servant, Jacob my chosen one, descended from Abraham my friend..."

I want to point out that the great, almighty, ever-present and all-powerful, all-knowing God himself calls Abraham His friend.

This was not Abraham's assessment of his relationship with God, nor is it how he thought about God.

This is God's assessment of His relationship with a little unimportant man named Abraham.

Why was Abraham called a friend of God? Because Abraham believed God. And because he believed God he obeyed God.

James 2:21-24

Don't you remember that our ancestor Abraham was shown to be right with God by his actions when he offered his son Isaac on the altar? You see, his faith and his actions worked together. His actions made his faith complete. And so it happened just as the Scriptures say: "Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith." He was even called the friend of God. So you see, we are shown to be right with God by what we do, not by faith alone.

Faith is more than saying you believe in God. The devil believes in God and trembles but the devil does not obey God. If we truly have faith in God, we will show it by our actions. So you see friendship with God is based on our present obedience.

Our human friendships as well are based on loyalty and trust. How long would we remain friends with someone we don't see eye to eye with and are always arguing with?

The kindly lady accosted the little boy on the beach, who stood with downcast head, and grinding his toes into the sand and looking very miserable and lonely indeed.

"Haven't you anybody to play with?" she inquired sympathetically.

The boy shook his head forlornly, as he explained:

"I have one friend--but I hate him!"

That doesn't seem like a good friend does it? "Friend" is a very interesting description of a relationship between a human and God. It is an intimate idea and it conveys a sense of closeness, and trust. A friend is one who comes along side us to be our helper, comforter, advocate, guide. And that is exactly how Jesus described the Holy Spirit. Let's return to John 15 where in verse 26 Jesus calls the Holy Spirit the **parakletos** (par-ak'-lay-tos). The Amplified Bible helps us to understand the meaning of this Greek word:

John 15:26 AMP

But when the Comforter (Counselor, Helper, Advocate, Intercessor, Strengtheners, Standby) comes, Whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of Truth Who comes (proceeds) from the Father, He [Himself] will testify regarding Me.

John 15:26 (THE MESSAGE)

"When the Friend I plan to send you from the Father comes — the Spirit of Truth issuing from the Father — he will confirm everything about me.

It is the Holy Spirit who is with us and is God our Friend, one who comes along side to help. But to remain in friendship with Him we must obey Him.

Ephesians 4:30-32

And do not bring sorrow to God's Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of evil behavior. Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

Don't misunderstand; God does not stop being our friend by our disobedience, we stop being His.

Is it possible to have and enjoy a friendship relationship with God? The answer is yes! And it is God who initiates a friendship with us, but to be God's friend we must be obedient.

Ask God what you need to do to be more obedient to Him. And during Lent confess your sin, repent or turn from them, overcome selfishness, fast and pray and seek the Lord, and come back to Jesus your Savior, your Lord, and your Friend.