

You've Got a Friend in Me: 2. The Name Written on You

Joyh 15:12-15; Revelation 3:12

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This month we are using the Toy Story movies as a way to talk about the importance of friendship in overcoming our insecurities and fears. While the Toy Story movies present light-hearted platforms for which to begin a conversation, a conversation about building friendships has never been more important than it is right now. These toys represent us, you and me and our human condition. Throughout Toy Story 2, we see this recurring theme of Woody's arm getting torn and repaired. And as this happens, he begins to wonder, as we do, what will happen to me if I am wounded, damaged or broken? Will I get set aside, put on a shelf and never played with again? Or worse yet....

A yard sale. Wheezy was put in the yard sale because his squeaker was broken. I think that's something we all wonder about from time to time. What will happen to me when I am wounded or damaged or over time, as I get old and slow down? Certainly during this pandemic many of us are feeling beat-up and broken. Will I get sick? Will I ever have a job again? Will I ever be employable again? Will my 401K bounce back? Will my business survive? Will my relationship survive? In the past many of us have experienced break-ups or divorces. Some have been abused as children or adults. Others hurt by a friend or rejected by someone we love. And because of all that we ask, does my life still have value? Will anyone ever love me again? Here's where we can see the good news of the gospel in this story. No matter how much you've been torn or hurt by someone else, Jesus has a special place in his heart for you. Jesus was drawn to people who were broken. In fact, Jesus stands up for the oppressed and cares about the most marginalized. And he not just cares for but he sits with, lives with, fights for, and protests alongside the marginalized. Black lives matter to Jesus. In his time here on earth, he constantly sought out and spent time with people who were rejected by society. Jesus sought out Samaritans, prostitutes, lepers and tax collectors and befriended them. He was known as a friend of sinners. The theme song of all the Toy Story movies is, "You've Got a Friend in Me." The next time you hear that song, I want you to imagine it is Jesus saying to you, "no matter how wounded, broken or rejected you are, you've got a friend in me." He sees you as a thing of beauty and can use your wounds and your brokenness in remarkable and beautiful ways. The second way we see the gospel message in this movie is in this idea of true friendship. So what does that kind of friendship look like? In our clip, we saw Woody put his own life on the line to rescue his friend Wheezy but in the process, Woody gets left behind and picked up by Al, he's the bad guy in this story. Al owns a toy store called Al's Toy Barn and he is a collector of rare dolls. He's been looking for a Woody doll to complete his set of Woody's Roundup Gang. Al steals Woody and for the rest of the movie we see his friends risking their lives to save their friend. The definition of true friendship is sacrificing yourself in order to save a friend. And of course, Jesus gave us the best example of what it means to be a true friend. But in the movie, we also see it in Buzz Lightyear and the other toys as they set out to rescue their pal.

We all need friends. We all want friends. I think we all try to be friends. Do you remember what we learned as children? The way to have a friend is to first be a friend. It means acts of selflessness and sacrifice. It means giving ourselves to others when they're in need, even people who we do not know or particularly like. A true friend is someone who will stand in the gap alongside the suffering and risk their own spiritual, emotional or even physical well-being. What did Jesus say about friendship? He said, "This is my commandment that you love each other just as I have loved you. No one has greater love than to give up one's life for a

friend.” Then he showed us what that love looks like by dying on a cross for us. He called us friends and then gave up his life for us.

Dr. Robin Maas, in her book, *Crucified Love*, offers this insight, “Few, if any of us, will be called to martyrdom; but all of us are called to a series of little deaths in the form of invitations to restrain or deny self. The sending of God by God was the sending of Love – a crucified Love willing to lay down its life for friends and enemies alike. Your mission and mine – which we can only perform insofar as we are in communion with God and with one another – is to submit, out of love for one another, to countless, daily ‘little deaths’ until we have yielded every least and last remnant of self to the purpose of Christ.” This cross-shaped love is not the negation of self to no further end. Jesus’ story didn’t stop with the tomb. Rooted in God’s love for the world, it bears the fruit of justice, joy and reconciliation. It creates space for life where it seems that there is none, making room for other people to flourish. It nurtures friendships and fosters the ability to trust in God’s abundance, grace, provision in the face of scarcity, death. It includes the excluded. It invites in the ostracized. It meets the needs of the hungry, the isolated, and the oppressed. Let me share a couple of images of what this love looks like. Charlie and Diana are members at Messiah Church but they winter in Atlanta. This year, because of COVID19, they got stuck there a little longer than intended. So last week, still in Atlanta, they participated in a peaceful demonstration for racial justice. Alongside their family, friends and church, they were standing up for the oppressed and marginalized. We can see it as group of protesters in Louisville, Kentucky created a human barricade to protect an officer who got separated from his unit during a protest over the death of Breonna Taylor. This remarkable image paints a picture for us of what it means to befriend someone we don’t even know. By building relationships that reach across the boundaries of age, race, gender, and political parties we can begin to emerge from the smoldering rubble and ruins of our broken relationships.

This leads me to my last point today. It’s this powerful theme that winds its way through all of the Toy Story movies and that has to do with our own identity and Whose we are. Andy, the boy, has this thing he does whenever he gets a new toy. He writes his name on their feet. It says, “this toy belongs to Andy”. Do you ever write your name on things? I think all parents of young children will relate to this. In preparing this message, I asked our daughter, Elizabeth, as a mom of 2 young boys, if she writes her boys’ names on things. She said, “Oh yes! Like everything that Oliver takes to preschool or it will never come home with him.” This backpack belongs to Oliver. At our house, Luckhardt Family Dinners are a big deal. And as our children have married and started families of their own our family get-togethers have also grown. The first couple of times this happened, we quickly ran out of drinking glasses. So after just a couple of times, I got smart or maybe just lucky. I discovered a marker for writing on glasses. Now, whenever our family gets together, the first person in the kitchen pulls out this marker and places it in a cup on the counter so that we can write our name on their glass and use that same glass all day long. This glass belongs to Nana. One of the greatest joys for me as one of your pastor is when I am invited to participate in a baptism. In baptism, God is saying, “You are mine.” And you are saying, “I am yours.” When we make the sign of the cross on your forehead with the anointing oil, we say the words, “You are marked as Christ’s own forever.” And that’s what we see in this theme, repeated throughout the movie, Andy’s name inscribed on the feet of his toys. This is a powerful image. I want to help you remember that God has inscribed his name on you. Jesus says, “I will write on them the name of God... I will also write on them my own name.” God has written his name on your heart and you belong to God.

After Al steals Woody, he has a toy cleaner come in to clean up Woody and in the process, he paints over Andy’s name on Woody’s boot and Woody stops remembering whose he

is. Eventually Buzz and the other toys arrive to rescue Woody but Woody says, "I can't go. I'm going to stay here and spend the rest of my life in a museum." And Buzz says, "But Woody, you're a toy. You're Andy's toy!" Woody says, "I don't care about that anymore," and he turns his back on his friends. He has forgotten Whose he is. Have you ever forgotten Whose you are? Have you forgotten that God has formed you and claims you and calls you his own? Maybe you've forgotten your baptism or you've wandered far away from God or done things that you think are unforgivable. Today, I want to help you remember that you are a beloved child of God. You belong to God and God belongs to you.

Jesus loves, seeks out and stands with people who are broken wounded and marginalized. God can use your brokenness in beautiful ways. God has written his name on your heart and you belong to him. Jesus demonstrated for us what true friendship looks like. He called us his friends and then died on a cross for us. And as followers of Christ, we are called to be the kind of friend that Jesus was and love like Jesus loved. Today, more than ever, we have a unique and critical opportunity to invest in building relationships that reach across boundaries so that we can start to emerge from the smoldering ruins and rubble and help the healing of this broken world.

Let's pray. Loving God, I am no longer my own, but yours. Put me to what you will, place me with whom you will. Put me to doing, put me to suffering. Let me be put to work for you or set aside for you, praised for you or criticized for you. Let me be full, let me be empty. Let me have all things, let me have nothing. I freely and fully surrender all things to your glory and service. And now, O wonderful and holy God, Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer, you are mine, and I am yours. So be it. And the covenant which I have made on earth, let it also be made in heaven. Amen. (An adaptation of John Wesley's Covenant Prayer.)

Grow, Pray, Study for the Week of June 14, 2020

Weekly Prayer: Loving God, I give thanks today that I am yours and you are mine. Your name is written on my heart. So help me never to forget who I am and Whose I am. Thank you for loving me when I feel broken, wounded and rejected. Because you first loved me, help me to be the kind of friend to others that you are to me. Amen.

Monday, June 15

Scripture: 1 Samuel 18:1-4; 20:1-4, 30-33, 41-42

When David had finished speaking to Saul, the soul of Jonathan was bound to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul. Saul took him that day and would not let him return to his father's house. Then Jonathan made a covenant with David, because he loved him as his own soul. Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that he was wearing, and gave it to David, and his armor, and even his sword and his bow and his belt.

David fled from Naioth in Ramah. He came before Jonathan and said, "What have I done? What is my guilt? And what is my sin against your father that he is trying to take my life?" He said to him, "Far from it! You shall not die. My father does nothing either great or small without disclosing it to me; and why should my father hide this from me? Never!" But David also swore, "Your father knows well that you like me; and he thinks, 'Do not let Jonathan know this, or he will be grieved.' But truly, as the Lord lives and as you yourself live, there is but a step between me and death." Then Jonathan said to David, "Whatever you say, I will do for you."

Then Saul's anger was kindled against Jonathan. He said to him, "You son of a perverse, rebellious woman! Do I not know that you have chosen the son of Jesse to your own shame, and to the shame of your mother's nakedness? For as long as the son of Jesse lives upon the earth, neither you nor your kingdom shall be established. Now send and bring him to me, for he shall surely die." Then Jonathan answered his father Saul, "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" But Saul threw his spear at him to strike him; so Jonathan knew that it was the decision of his father to put David to death.

As soon as the boy had gone, David rose from beside the stone heap and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. He bowed three times, and they kissed each other, and wept with each other; David wept the more. Then Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, since both of us have sworn in the name of the Lord, saying, 'The Lord shall be between me and you, and between my descendants and your descendants, forever.'" He got up and left; and Jonathan went into the city.

Observation: Woody and Buzz—friends for infinity and beyond. In Bible history, most of us know something about Israel's King David, but fewer know about his close friend Jonathan. Eldest son of King Saul by his only wife, he was his father's heir, which makes his loyalty and affection for David, who succeeded Saul, the more wonderful. His loyalty to David, however, was made more difficult because it conflicted with his filial duty to and affection for Saul, his father and sovereign.

Application: Jonathan's loyalty to his friend David showed itself in his willingness to face his father's unstable rage by standing up for his friend. Fortunately, few of us ever face that severe a challenge in showing loyalty to our friends. When have you faced a test of your loyalty to a friend, perhaps by family or another friend's disapproval? How did you deal with the situation? Looking back, how do you feel about your action toward your friend?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, help me to learn from Woody and Buzz, from Jonathan and David, and most of all from you the deepest meanings of being a friend. Make me a loyal, dependable friend. Amen.

Tuesday, June 16

Scripture: Acts 11:25-26; Revelation 3:10-12

Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, and when he had found him, he brought him to Antioch. So it was that for an entire year they met with the church and taught a great many people, and it was in Antioch that the disciples were first called "Christians."

Because you have kept my word of patient endurance, I will keep you from the hour of trial that is coming on the whole world to test the inhabitants of the earth. I am coming soon; hold fast to what you have, so that no one may seize your crown. If you conquer, I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God; you will never go out of it. I will write on you the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem that comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name.

Observation: Andy's name on their shoe soles showed who Woody and Buzz belonged to. Scholar N. T. Wright told how Antioch, a diverse city, linked Christ's name to his disciples: "there the word 'Christian' first came into use. It was a nickname...just as 'Methodist' was at first a word used by the opponents of Wesley and his friends to sneer at their 'Methodical' ways of organizing their Bible study and prayer groups. Like many nicknames, it tells us a lot about the

popular perception of what was going on. You would hear every language...in Antioch...but the one you could guarantee to be understood in was...Greek. 'Christ'...was the Greek word for 'Messiah,'... 'God's anointed king.' Jesus' followers were thinking and speaking in such a way that they were called 'the king's people,' 'Messianists,' Christians."

Application: Scholar William Barclay wrote about Revelation 3:12, "Jesus Christ will mark his faithful ones with his new name: what that name was we need not even speculate, for no man knows it (Revelation 19:12), but in the time to come, when Christ has conquered all, his faithful ones will bear the badge which shows that they are his and share his triumph." What does your name mean? Do you know why your parents chose that name for you? Do you like your name? How has your name shaped your view of yourself and of your place in the world, positively or negatively? When the poetic image of Revelation comes true and God gifts you with a new name (cf. Revelation 2:17, 3:12), what personal meaning do you want that name to carry?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, it is because you are the Christ (God's anointed king) that I am a Christ-ian. You are my king, and how I look forward to spending eternity with you in the safety and victory that Revelation promised. Amen.

Wednesday, June 17

Scripture: Matthew 18:12-14; John 15:15

What do you think? If a shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. So it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.

I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.

Observation: Infinity and beyond? Rescuing Woody took a trip to "Al's Toy Barn." Jesus came from the mysterious reaches of "infinity" to this planet on a very real rescue mission. Probably echoing the image from Ezekiel 34:1-12, he told a story about a shepherd who lost one sheep from his flock. The shepherd was not at all unmoved by the loss. He dropped everything, searched until he found the lost sheep—and felt great joy when he found it. The story fit, because Jesus searched for more than just a sheep; he searched for people he called "friends."

Application: Pastor Bruce Larson in his book, *The Preacher's Commentary* wrote, "A shepherd once explained to me that sheep nibble their way into lostness. They move from one tuft of green grass to the next, sometimes right through a hole in the fence. When they're done nibbling, they can't find the hole and they're lost. Some of us know what that is—to nibble ourselves bit by bit into the far country." When have you been like the lost sheep, not sure how to find your way home? What "shepherd(s)" has God used to find you and bring you home?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you have changed me from "lost sheep" to "friend." Remind me each day what a privilege it is for me to be a friend of the king of the universe. Amen.

Thursday, June 18

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

So we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

Observation: Andy was sad that a torn seam cost his toy Woody an arm. The apostle Paul knew firsthand about physical challenges (cf. 2 Corinthians 11:23-28; 12:7-10). He wasn't being hypothetical when he wrote that "Even if our bodies are breaking down on the outside, the person that we are on the inside is being renewed every day." Yet he believed, as a pastor in Frederick Buechner's novel *The Final Beast* said, that "the worst isn't the last thing about the world. It's the next to the last thing. The last thing is the best... You are terribly loved and forgiven. Yes. You are healed. All is well." In Christ, we look beyond the worst to the "eternal stockpile of glory" Jesus promised.

Application: Paul wrote that we focus on things we can't see, which are more durable than what we can see. That can be hard to do. What steps do you take, in this world that seems full of disappointment and pain, to anchor your hope in God's goodness, and to live with patience and trust? How do you maintain your trust in God's good world, beyond our time-bounded world (and much of the time out of our sight)?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, some days I just feel weary or worn out. Anchor my hope, not in this world where everything ends, but in your eternal world of life and light. Amen.

Friday, June 19

Scripture: Titus 2:11-14

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all, training us to renounce impiety and worldly passions, and in the present age to live lives that are self-controlled, upright, and godly, while we wait for the blessed hope and the manifestation of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He it is who gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.

Observation: Rescuing Jessie from a plane—not bad for a cloth pull-string sheriff! But the apostle Paul summed up a crucial Christian truth: God's grace, expressed through Jesus' life, death and resurrection, brought salvation for all people. And we all need salvation (or "rescue"), whether we struggle with "obvious" sins like racism, murder, theft, adultery, etc., "respectable" sins like pride, impatience, judgmentalism and anger (which are often harder to recognize), or perhaps with some of both.

Application: In John Wesley's class-conscious England, where he launched the Methodist movement, many people thought the Christian faith was only for the "proper" people. Wesley, like Paul before him, knew that the good news was for all people. Wesley once wrote in his journal about a group he'd preached to, "I am apt to think many of the hearers scarcely ever heard a Methodist before, or perhaps any other preacher... Are not their souls also precious in the sight of God?" Who do you know who is precious to God with whom you might share the good news of Jesus?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you gave yourself for me. Day by day, grow in me a heart that, in response to your generous self-giving, is eager to live out the good actions of your kingdom. Amen.

Saturday, June 20

Scripture: Galatians 6:7-10

Do not be deceived; God is not mocked, for you reap whatever you sow. If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit. So let us not grow weary in doing what is right, for we will reap at harvest time, if we do not give up. So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all, and especially for those of the family of faith.

Observation: In the first Toy Story movie, Woody had to teach Buzz that he was a “T-O-Y,” with a mission to bring joy to children. In Toy Story 2, Buzz had to remind Woody of that, when the sheriff thought it might be better to live on display in a glass collector’s case. Sadly, sometimes Jesus’ followers also feel the urge to turn their faith into a display piece, untouched by real life’s messiness and challenges. But faith is never something to keep isolated, shiny and “just for show.” The apostle Paul wrote about relationships, about how we treat one another. He pictured us as farmers who need to be careful what we plant in the soil of our lives. The point of our faith, he said, is to energize and empower us to work for the good of all.

Application: Verse 9 said doing good takes focused effort. The first verb [“grow weary”] puts emphasis on losing interest (for example, “spiritless”) and the second [“give up”] on becoming discouraged or relaxing one’s efforts. This can be a spiritual hazard. Have you ever gotten tired of doing good? If so, what helped renew your energy to bear good fruit by blessing others? Verse 10 said we should work for the good “whenever we have an opportunity.” Do you ever feel that you’re stuck, that you have no opportunity to do anybody any good? How can the Holy Spirit’s presence help you find creative ways of doing good at any point in your life?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, let your light shine from my life, not out of a shiny display case, but amid the darkness and dirt of real human life. Help me never to tire of doing the good you call me to do. Amen.