

John 15:9-17

(Jesus said:) As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you, abide in my love. If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. 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. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

“Church Friends”

“This is my commandment,
that you love one another as I have loved you.

John 15:12

The moment the words came out of the young mother's mouth as she spoke from the podium, I wanted to rise from my seat in the AA fellowship and shout, 'Nooooooooo!' Speaking the truth about the power of addiction that lay await in the fears of her heart she said: 'Even the love I have for my child isn't enough to keep me from drinking.' I wanted to stand in protest but I didn't because I knew what she said was true. Motherly love does not win out over the selfish needs of the body and greedy ego. In the year of her college graduation I received this poem from my daughter in a mother's day card.

“Mother”

I remember as a little girl, late at night I cried for you. Fever raging and head pounding, nothing to take the pain away. I cry your name one more time pleading for you to help. Finally my cries are heard and you appear. With the touch of your hand all the pains are gone.

In the third grade I wanted to play. Basketball was a boy's sport. They squeezed me in on a team. I looked around and felt no courage. I was the only girl on their team. I went home feeling beaten and useless. Looking for you to cheer me up. That day you taught me about being assertive, No more did I whine about being the only girl.

As my teenage years began, I no longer looked for you. My friends began to take your place. I now had a new shoulder to cry on. No longer on your level of thinking I wandered off track for several years. My problems now seemed too big, for you to take the fears away.

I recall many times in high school, my thoughts and body were contaminated. As I would pop another pill I saw your face, sad and worried is the vision I saw. I would shake the vision from my mind, and lose a few more years.

Tired and weary, my first year of college was over, going nowhere, doing nothing. I went home for the weekend. You welcomed me with open arms, forgetting all the hurt I've caused. You cooked my favorite dinner, and sat down to say, "how have you been"?

I come to my present state of mind, where my visions are no longer gray. I'm going somewhere and doing things only on the strength you gave me. You showed me how to be strong you showed me how to believe in myself. Whenever I feel scared or blue, once again, I call to take the fear away.

For my daughter, cutting the cord of fear relieving, comforting love came at the onset of her teenage years. I thought something was up when instead of her face lighting up when I praised her for . . . anything . . . she would come back with, "You have to say that, you're my mother." And, I thought something was up when she started walking ten feet ahead of me rather than beside me as we walked down the street. Developmental and self-psychologists teach, that at puberty this 'you-don't understand' me thinking and refusal to be a 'minnie-me' of mom is normal. They say that it is a crisis time of separation and individuation from the secured bond of parental love in which the ego gets greedy for the sake of developing its own identity and sense of self. It's a crisis time of adopting values, thinking differently, discovering likes and dislikes, owning strengths and recognizing weaknesses, making moral choices. Buddhist wisdom teacher Jack Kornfeld framed it in this way: The independence and rebelliousness of our adolescence offer us yet another quality essential to our practice of mindfulness: the insistence that we find out the truth for ourselves accepting no one's word above our own experience. For teens, the truth comes from their

experience with friends. In teen years friends become all important. It's all about acceptance and belonging; being understood and liked; participating in a world larger than the small one from which one was birthed. During adolescence, sports, theatre, gaming, music, neighbor, tech, political, religious friends become primary in shaping one's character and behavior.

A couple of generations after the death and resurrection of Jesus, a crisis of identity hit the gospel writer's Jewish/Christian community of faith. It was a fearful time of separation and individuation from tightly knit families in which following Jesus could get loved ones killed and put the whole congregation at risk. Some thought it best to lie low, turn inward, and not rock the boat. Some though it best to keep the faith by obeying the rule bound teachers of the Law rather than Jesus, the new rabbi on the block. Persecution and marginalization, grief and loss, uncertainty and doubt, isolation and fear lay in the hearts of the faithful who, believed themselves made in the image of God, chosen to be God's people, and given the Holy mandate to be God's blessing to the world.

Christianity is an offshoot of Judaism, a branch growing from our forebears faith in and love of Israel's One God. When puberty hit John's God fearing community he helped them stay grafted to their roots while individuating into their new religious identity by giving Jesus the compelling name of friend and the unifying glue of Love Ethic Command. 'I have called you friends because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Abba.' (vs.15b) That's why friends of Jesus now say such faith things as: 'The unconditional love of God as made known through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus casts out all our fear, relieves our sorrow, and comforts us. That's why the church's mission is to step out into the world and befriend others, not with the kind of conditional love that we and the world give, but rather with the unselfish Love, forgiving and compassionate heart, hope filled and courageous spirit, and arc of the universe vision that bends toward justice and peace that Christ gives while weaving us together in unity and love.