



**VILLAGE
CHURCH**

Presbyterian (USA)

On Being a Friend

SCRIPTURE:
John 15:12-17

Aug. 6, 2023 — Sermon by Rev. Dr. Rodger Nishioka

The “Toy Story” movies focus on the toys who belong to a boy named Andy. When no human is around, the toys come to life. In the first “Toy Story” movie, Andy is five years old and on the verge of his sixth birthday. The undisputed leader of Andy’s toys is Woody, a cowboy action figure. He is the leader because he is Andy’s favorite. Andy and his family are moving across town to a new home and early in the first film, Woody calls the toys together for a meeting to prepare for the move and to let them know that Andy’s birthday party has been moved up because of the impending move. In this first clip, let’s meet Andy’s toys. [movie clip shown]

It is a truth for all of us that we want to love and be loved. We were created that way because we were created in the image of God, the *imago Dei*. Turn to someone around you and say, “You are created in the *imago Dei*.” Being created in the image of God means that we seek to love and be loved just as God does. None of us likes to be rejected. None of us want to be replaced. At every birthday party and at Christmas, the toys are worried that Andy will be gifted a new toy, a better toy, that will replace them.

The overarching theme for all of the “Toy Story” movies is friendship. The theme song for all of these movies is, “You’ve Got a Friend in Me.” The lyrics say, “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, that you’ve got a friend in me.”

In the scripture reading for today, Jesus talks about friends and friendship. Remember the setting. This is Jesus’ last night with his disciples—the women and men who have been with him for three and a half years. Later this night, he will be betrayed and arrested and then tortured and killed. He knows this but his disciples do not. Jesus says, “This is my

commandment. Love one another as I have loved you.” It’s not a suggestion. Not “when you feel like it.” Not “when it is convenient for you.” I want you to hear this with an urgency in his voice.

All of this time, three and a half years, he has been teaching them by his example. Love as I have loved you. Then he defines this love in a way that I am certain they will remember. He says, “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” This is the kind of love Jesus wants us to show to one another. That we would be willing to give up our lives for each other.

I remember these verses first took hold of me when I was a teenager. I remember thinking about who I would die for. I knew right away that I would die for my parents. And I would die for any of my brothers (on most days). Okay. Every day. And three years ago, when my sister-in-law Vicki was fighting her battle with breast cancer, I prayed to God, “Okay, I know it doesn’t work this way and I know this is sketchy theology but if you could work something out, I would take Vicki’s place.”

I have thought about this, too. You know I am so honored to be your pastor. You know I love you. I know this: I would do anything to keep you from harm. Any of you. If someone came into this building intending to hurt any of you, I would do everything I could to prevent that—including giving up my life.

Jesus says, “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.”

That means that friendship is not transactional, as in: I’ll be your friend if you do this for me. That’s not how Jesus defines friendship. True friends do not keep score. True friends love. Love so much that they’re willing to die for another because love always involves being willing to sacrifice for another.

Ultimately, Jesus gives his life for us all. That’s what the celebration of the Lord’s supper is all

about. That's why we say, "the body of Christ broken for you" and "the blood of Christ shed for you." Jesus commands us to love one another. And love, the kind of love that Jesus Christ has shown to us, always involves sacrifice.

So in "Toy Story 3," Andy is now 18 and he is going away to college. He decides it is time to share his beloved toys—the toys who have accompanied him all of his life. But he needs to find someone who will love his toys as he has loved them. He chooses Bonnie, who loves toys like he does and he decides to give them to her.

Bonnie and Andy spend the morning playing together and it is time for Andy to leave. By now, he knows that he can entrust his friends to Bonnie—that she will love them as he has all of his life. As he prepares to drive away, he has one more message to share with them. [movie clip shown]

Last week I told you about Max whose father Alex died on Sept. 11, 2001, in the attack on the World Trade Towers in New York City. Thirteen years later, in August of 2014, Max was getting ready to leave Tenafly, New Jersey for his first year of college at the University of Michigan. On his last Sunday at church, before going to Ann Arbor, Max asked his pastor, the Rev. Dr. Eileen Linder if he could have a few moments to say something to the congregation. Eileen said, "of course" without knowing what Max was going to say.

On that Sunday, at the close of worship, Max got

up and explained that he was getting ready to go off to college and before he did, he wanted to say something. He started by naming a number of people in the congregation who took care of him when he was a little guy. One woman took care of him every day after school until his mom came home from work. Then he pointed out a gentleman in the church who taught him how to change a flat tire. He named another who helped him learn how to tie a bow tie for his junior prom. He named several members who let him practice driving with them and thanked them for their courage. He thanked several of them for coming to his baseball games. He thanked them for taking care of him and his mom these 13 years. He thanked them for helping raise him. Most of all, he said, "Thank you for sharing your memories of my Dad. You helped me to know my Dad." Max looked out at this beautiful church and said, "Thank you. I will always carry all of you in my heart." Love, the kind of love Jesus commands us to do, always involves sacrifice.

Jesus says, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." Jesus says, "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 you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another."

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.