

"Morning Star"

II Peter 1:16-21

Transfiguration

FEB 3 2008

"*Morning Star*" ... I came up with the title for this sermon long before I actually figured out what I was going to say about it. I think I was going to talk about how Peter describes Jesus Christ as the "*morning star*", a sign of hope for people who are struggling to make it through life, maybe struggling to get through just one day. "*Morning Star*" means that Jesus is trying to give us a sign of hope from the moment we wake up in the morning.

One morning my friend Kathy woke up and realized before she even opened her eyes that she was already defeated. Before she even put her feet into her slippers the day was a lost cause. I won't go into all of her problems, except to say that she had four teenagers, and all four of them were in serious trouble, in serious trouble nearly every day ... drugs, crime, jail, pregnancy, and worse.

Kathy would tell her story to me and it felt like she was standing in a deep hole and digging deeper, each word of her sad story another shovelful. Deeper and deeper she went, until she couldn't see the morning star anymore even if she tried looking up, which she rarely did.

Since Kathy was my friend I tried real hard to help her. "*Kathy, why don't you try this. Before you think about your problems in the morning, go right into the bathroom and look yourself in the eye in the mirror and tell yourself, "I am a child of God, made in God's image, and no one is going to stop me from having a nice day". "But what about my son in jail, my daughter in trouble," she would begin to say. "Kathy, do that bathroom mirror exercise before you do anything else. That is your private, intimate moment with God. Don't let anyone take that moment away from you. No one can survive for long if they cannot find even a minute of hope to start the day"*". I hope that I was a good friend that day. I hope each of us can resolve to have that morning star moment each morning before the day begins. I hope that we can all think of a friend who needs this kind of encouragement.

As I was beginning to prepare those notes for today some weeks ago in my office, two children came in and talked with me about how they wanted to be friends, but they had gotten into a bad habit of name-calling and poking at each other, and just generally trying to be mean. Since this is **Bring a Friend Sunday**, maybe this would be a good place to start. Let's do everything we can to encourage friendship, not only among people who already like being with each other, but also for people who are having trouble getting a friendship started. So let's agree that name-calling and poking are not the best places to start a friendship. And let's review some rules that

our children wrote for people who worship here. Kindness is more likely to lead to friendship than name-calling and poking!

It's well worth the effort involved in making, having and keeping friends. One of the greatest treasures in the world is friendship. I have probably officiated at more than 200 funerals or memorial services in my 25 years of being a Presbyterian pastor. All kinds of people, in big churches, small funeral homes, in a rose garden, by a swimming pool, and even at the bottom of the Grand Canyon. Many times relatives and friends rise to speak at these events, to testify about the special person who has died. Never in all of these years has a banker, investment manager, or diamond merchant stood to testify about the money, stocks, property or the jewelry that the deceased possessed as the best measure of his or her life. Not once, not even close to once.

See if you agree with this sentiment - friends will get you through times of no money better than money will get you through times of no friends.

Friendship is a treasure. I have also learned that friendship is more mystery than it is science. Some friendships appear to be made in heaven, while others defy any logic whatsoever. In high school my friend Pete was one of the first people I met when I went to a new school. We sat next to each other in the back row in calculus class each morning. And after a few weeks we figured out that we liked to play golf. Pete and I played a lot of golf, but it turned out that was about the only thing we had in common. On the serious issues of the day we were nearly always on opposite sides. He was in favor of the war, I was against it. I was in favor of ending racism, and Pete denied that racism even existed. He made fun of my church involvement. He drove his car like such a maniac, that one time I jumped out of the car on a rainy night and walked home several miles. In college Pete never went to class and he didn't even return for the second year. His plans for a business degree were sidetracked by too much attention to the liquor store. In fact, Pete was hard to get along with most of the time, but how do you explain it, we were friends. We might still be friends to this day, except that he died of liver failure before he reached the age of thirty from too much drinking.

I think that it is very difficult to set out to make friends. But when we are active in the world, in school, in our job, or from activity in the community we'll make more friends than if we stay at home with the curtains drawn and the doors locked.

You can look around the room this morning and count many friends. You can also look around and see folks that you've never met before or don't

know very well. Our new CLP student, Bill, is probably a stranger to everyone here, so please make a point of welcoming him to our church. I think he'll make many friends here.

Friendship is not a Christian doctrine, it's just a good thing for everybody, and many of us count as friends people who are Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, or no religion at all. This week I visited a program that might turn out to be a mission project for us this summer. It's called Project Life, and it's located near Albion. Each summer they welcome about a dozen children from other countries who have lost parents and homes due to war. It's like a summer camp for three months, and the children make friends with American families and later return to Chechnya, Bosnia or Afghanistan with new confidence in themselves and for their future, and of course with the treasure of many new friends to encourage them. In a world that is so easily divided by religious labels, ethnic hatred, and nationalist passion, the friendship of Muslim and Christian children could be a powerful thing indeed. It may be that friendship is the treasure of our lives, but the greatest treasure is when our friendships cross boundaries that were meant to keep people apart.

It's never easy. One time I had two teens in my youth group, both named Robert. We went to a church member's home for a swim day in the pool. Robert and Robert were at their worst that day, name-calling and poking, and just generally trying to annoy the other. Finally, the life guard called them together and told them they would have to stay out of the pool unless they could find just one nice thing to say about the other. After a great deal of thought, the first Robert turned to the second Robert and said, "*You have nice hair!*". And the second Roberto said the same thing to the first Robert. And from that one bit of commonality the day at the pool was saved. For the rest of the afternoon, Robert and Robert would shout it out "*you have nice hair!*".

Friendship has the power to overcome the name-calling and poking. Friendship requires us to stretch. Friendship has the power to cross difficult boundaries. Friendship is one of the treasures of our lives. Friendship is a constant reminder that God will stop at nothing to give us hope, even before we get out of bed.