

# Pastor Jamie's Sermon

Good Shepherd Church, May 5, 2024  
"Friends and Servants"

## *The Message*

When you think of the word "slave" or "servant," I imagine that something fairly specific tends to come to mind.

The first thing that comes to mind for me is the images of slaves that I saw when I went on the Moravian Church's racial justice pilgrimage to Montgomery, Alabama.

I see images of chained Africans crossing the Atlantic on ships in spaces that gave them enough room to stretch out, and that's about it.

I see housekeepers and field workers, working until their bodies could quite literally not do anything more, but having to keep going because it was their only choice.

I see the images of slaves and servants we see portrayed in movies and media, who are not invited to the table despite their hunger, but instead are expected to prepare and serve the meal, and find their own sustenance after their masters have been cared for and fed.

I do not typically picture a servant or slave becoming friends with their master.

And yet, this is exactly what we see Jesus do in today's scripture.

More accurately, we see Jesus talking not as master to servant, but as servant to servant.

Even though he says, "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead I have called you friends..."

Jesus is not putting himself above his disciples. Rather, he is speaking to them on the same level.

He is a servant of God, and he sees them as servants of God as well.

Jesus modeled servanthood in every way, and he called others to do the same.

Doing so resulted in him being harassed, persecuted, and eventually put to death, but he modeled it nonetheless.

We may need to consider letting go of the view of servanthood or slavery that we hold based on what we know of history's definition of servanthood or slavery.

For some people, especially those in many of our favorite biblical stories, having the title of "slave" was a deep honour.

For example, Moses, Joshua, David, Paul, and James counted it as a privilege to be considered a slave of the Lord.

We have to remember that the disciples did not choose Jesus as their rabbi.

Jesus sought *them* out. Jesus called *them* to service.

For much of Jesus' ministry, he taught, acted, and modeled the way he expected all of his followers to think and act.

So in some ways, they were apprentice-servants under Jesus' guidance.

Now, in this passage, they receive this shocking news that they were being taken into a much deeper relationship with Jesus: he no longer considered them servants, but instead, he considered them friends.

Why? What did this mean in reality for the disciples?

Jesus would essentially be depending on his friends to be the hands and feet for the mission of God.

He reminds them, especially toward the final days of his ministry, that everything written about him in the Law of Moses and the prophecies had to be fulfilled.

Jesus spends much of his ministry teaching his disciples, passing on knowledge, and, in a lot of ways, encouraging them to step well outside of their comfort zones so that they could understand scriptures and the work he expected them to do through a missional lens.

He needed to help them understand that from the beginning to the end, the mission of *God* is the epic story they needed to be a part of.

They move from servants to friends of Jesus because Jesus doesn't just need servants who follow orders blindly.

Jesus needs friends who feel equally as called to mission and service – friends who feel just as passionate and excited about their call as he does.

We understand that it is possible to be a servant without being a friend.

In fact, most people who are servants or slaves likely hold some kind of negative feelings toward the person or people they consider “masters.”

But, it is impossible to be a true friend and not be a servant.

Christ gave us a new command: to love each other as he loved us.

This theme is repeated so often in scripture that as a pastor, I sometimes feel like I'm preaching the same message over and over again – love each other.

Just love each other!

Love your neighbours as you love yourself!

God says to love one another!

Do you think Jesus thought this was an important command?

As the Father has loved us, so we will love.

As the Father sent Jesus, so he sends us as servant-friends to bear fruit.

I do believe it's possible to serve others and love others without being friends with them.

We can serve people we have only just met, regardless of whether or not we will ever see them again.

But, we do not keep true friends for very long if we do not also set aside our own needs on occasion and serve their needs as well.

I have been in friendships with people who do not serve my needs well, and they do not last long.

It is not because I am selfish and only want to be friends with people who will serve me and only me.

It is because it doesn't feel like mutual friendship if I am the only one serving.

It becomes exhausting, if you have never been in a relationship like that before.

I think this is what Jesus is getting at with his disciples.

He does not consider them merely servants, expecting them to serve him without their own needs being met.

He is telling them that as his friends, he serves them as much as they serve him.

He is modeling this love-in-action to them so that they can take that love and spread it to the world.

He is teaching them, just as they are trying to learn.

Jesus is in their service as much as they are in his service.

So, as you leave here today, I invite you to ask yourselves these questions:

Who are you servant-friending today?

How are you modeling Jesus' command to love each other as he loved us?

May we all leave this place and go into the mission field ready to be friends *and* servants to those around us, modeling the love of Jesus outwardly to everyone we meet. Amen.

Let us pray:

God, we are grateful to have a friend in Jesus, and that we are more than merely servants. We ask that you continue to guide us in the direction you would have us go, helping us to servant-friend others in ways we may never have considered before. Help us to live out our faith in meaningful ways that honour your love for us and the model of care and compassion you gave us in your Son, Jesus Christ. We pray all of this in your Holy name. Amen.