

Randy: Friend of Jesus

Jn 15:12-17, Ro 5.1-11; Randy Martinson Funeral; January 17, 2025

Randy liked to talk. Not everyone who likes to talk is the same, though. Some people just can't stop talking; it's as if they aren't comfortable unless they hear something coming out of their own mouths. Some people are smooth talkers, careful with their words not to offend you because they want something from you. And there are those who just like talking to people, like Randy did. That certainly helped when out selling bread to customers. Being friendly and personable is a helpful trait for anyone in sales, but Randy didn't talk just to make sales. What you saw and heard from him was who he was and what he was like. He liked people to be cut and dry, to the point, and honest – like he tried to be with them. Randy liked people, cared about people, which made for friendly conversations with him.

If we want others to be friendly to us, and more than that, to become our friends, the best way is for us to be friendly toward them, be a friend to them first. We trust that our friends care about us as we are and stick by our side when things get tough for us. With friends, even if we have not always been as friendly as we should have been to them, they will forgive us our faults and keep us as their friends.

One of Randy's friends is Jesus, who stuck by his side. We heard about the kind of friend Jesus is in our Gospel Reading from John 15, which we heard a few moments ago. Jesus was talking to His twelve disciples during the evening He was later betrayed by one of those He called His friends, Judas Iscariot. Jesus wanted to explain to His disciples what it meant for Him to love them as a friend.

“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”

This is how Jesus befriends us, how Jesus was a friend to Randy: He **laid down His life** for us, His friends. This is the foundation of the Christian faith. We believe that Jesus suffered and died on the cross for us. Jesus took our sin and death on Himself to set us free from them, forgiving our sins and saving us from death, promising to raise us from the dead. This is what we confessed as our faith a moment ago in the Apostles' Creed: “I believe in...the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting.”

The “forgiveness of sins” is a phrase that is commonly heard and talked about in the Christian Church, but it is not always understood very well, even by those who have been Christians their whole lives. God says that all people are sinful from before they were born until the day they die. That’s you, that’s me, and that was Randy. God defines what sin is: not doing what He commands. We must love Him above all else and loving each other. Jesus said: **“This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”**

God’s Word says that death is the consequence of sin in us and sin done by us. This is something undeniable at a funeral. The remains of the dead person we love cannot be explained away. Randy died because he was a sinner. You and I are going to die because we are sinners. The only One who is not a sinner is Jesus Christ, yet He died, but His death is different than ours in this important way. Jesus died out of love for us. Jesus took our sins and the blame for them and the death we deserved on Himself because He considered us His friends. Jesus paid for our sins with His life because our deaths cannot pay for our sins, only verify that we are sinners and deserve to die because of our sin.

We need a friend like Jesus, who says to us: **“I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you.”** We can tell who our friends are, and who our friends are not, by what they are willing to do for us. Jesus was willing to suffer and die for us as His friends even though, as St. Paul reminded us in our Epistle from Romans five, that we were not friends with Him at the time He died for us, but His enemies.

Christ died for the ungodly... God shows His love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by His blood, much more shall we be saved by Him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life. God in Christ chose to make friends with His enemies/us, the very ones whose sins He would have to die for. That’s why we can trust that He will always be our Friend; He was willing to do all that to make us His friends and to keep us as His friends forever.

Rev. Anthony T. Bertram

When Randy found out he was dying of cancer, he reached out to Pastor Fast, who was a pastor of our congregation when he and Norma joined. Carla and Pastor Fast befriended Randy, whom they met and got to know at Edie's Restaurant. Though Randy had not been in church for a long time, they invited him to come back, which he ended up doing. I asked Pastor Fast and Carla to share with me something about that.

They related to me that once, when they were eating at Edie's, Randy came and up and told them how happy he was being back in the Church. He said that it was wonderful knowing all that Christ did was not only for others, but also for him. He was so happy to know it wasn't too late, that God still loved him and forgave him. He was both amazed and comforted by that. (from email, Dec. 28, 2024)

This is what Jesus was getting at when He said: **“No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his Master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from My Father I have made known to you.”** Randy knew what Jesus had done for him as his Friend.

When I ask Randy's family what they wanted people to remember about him – besides his love of talking to people and eating food – was that they could honor him as a hard worker in life by working hard themselves and by being good to people the way he had been a friend to others. Those are things worth remembering about Randy!

Most of you are not members of St. Paul Lutheran Church like Randy was, so I don't know what your faith or your relationship with God is like. Do you know Jesus as your Friend like Randy did and still does? Even when Randy wandered from God in his life, God did not stop loving him and waited patiently for him to return. Knowing this by faith at the end of his life, Randy had the joy and comfort that God would welcome him into His loving arms when he died. We all need a Friend like that! What Jesus did for Randy as his Friend, He has done for you and me. **“Greater love has no one than this, that Someone [Jesus] lay down His life for His friends.”**

What a Friend we have in Jesus! Amen.