

Preached by Carl Rush  
Bush Hill Presbyterian Church  
Alexandria, VA 22310  
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John 6:24–35  
2 Samuel 11:26 —12:13

## FRIENDS OF GOD

We know that King David is said to have the heart of God. In other words, we are told that David is one who is a friend of God. Did God choose David to be a friend, as we read early on several Sundays ago, because David had beautiful eyes and was handsome? Did God choose David as a friend because David was so popular—or maybe because he looked so good when he put on his uniform—and God just couldn't resist?

No. We understand that when we read the scripture that says David had the heart of the Lord that God's love for David was kindled because David responded with care and true interest in people. David cared more about people than he did about appearances. He cared more about those who were his subjects and his fellow Israelites. Whether they were from the north or from the south, he cared about them more than he cared about amassing a powerful kingdom. These are the reasons that God loved David so. David reflected the love for all people that God had for David.

Remember how, in Michal's words, David debased himself by dancing before the Ark when it is returned back to Jerusalem? He didn't care about anything as much as he cared about God. But all that changed when he forgot his friend who had loved him first. When David lost his center—his God-centeredness—he fell deep into the clutches of self-righteousness. He forgot about his concern for his subjects. He played favorites with his friends. He played favorites with his family. David is just like us, or more accurately, we are just like David. Because when we are left to our own judgments, we will always discriminate against others. We will always withhold forgiveness—first from those we love the most, and then from those within our extended family of friends and relationships—and finally we will withhold forgiveness for all the wrongs in the world and become cynical the way so many have come to characterize the Christian church.

It's all too easy to become self-absorbed, like America's celebrated most available bachelor or bachelorette. Have you noticed how these horrible depictions of entertainment take humans and completely divest them of any sense of God-centeredness in their lives? And as they lose more and more of a connection with anything but themselves, have you noticed how easily they give up on others and then their own dreams, as well. This is the story of King David and his disobedience also. This is the story that we all must take for God's word for us today—the story of David's disobedience is our story of infidelity toward Jesus Christ.

Move with me from this conversation David has with Nathan to the last time you came into this sanctuary truly Christ-centered ... and the last time you looked at someone else here at Bush Hill Presbyterian Church that you did not know (could be a long time mem-

ber or a visitor). Did your conversation with that person begin with the same attentiveness that you reserve for a long lost friend? You know what it's like—people that you haven't seen in ages and yet within moments of reconnecting, it's as if you were never apart. When you came into this sanctuary truly God-centered, and you encountered this person, did he or she think that you cared honestly for what was happening in his or her life and those of friends and family?

Are we able to practice being people who are willing to attend to one another the way best friends do, at that level of confidence and comfort that goes beyond casual friendship to deep devotion—the kind of devotion that David and God shared. All Nathan had to do was tell David a simple story, and David knew he had broken his deepest vows of friendship to God.

God wants us to come here not just to hear the word but to become the word for one another. God wants us to practice conversations that embody the quality of genuine caring rather than our sentimental substitute. Yes, God wants us to be accountable for our actions; in other words, God wants us to take responsibility for our part in broken relationships rather than condemning all those who have fallen so far short, who have disappointed us so deeply.

Yes, God wants our honest objectivity, not our callousness. But the truth is when we experience community because of our faith, we're prone, aren't we, as if we couldn't help it—we're prone to be callous, condemning and sentimental. And we wonder why the Church is in trouble? (By the way, Bush Hill Presbyterian Church doesn't meet the qualification of being a church in trouble—our numbers may be thin in the summer, but everything else that we say and believe says we are a very healthy congregation.)

We're healthy when we're willing to practice this deep friendship born of faith. However, this art form of showing interest in mutual pursuit of deeper interest in one another, a deeper connection to one another, a passion for truth—this love for God requires that we constantly stay focused on Jesus.

How do you do that? I want to take a story from Joe Girardi, the manager of the New York Yankees. One hot June afternoon, Joe was about to leave the comforts of the air-conditioned players entrance. He was about to step on to the heat of Veterans Stadium, the wrath of the Red Sox. It was a middle aged man who came up to him and called his name. Joe wasn't the kind of celebrity to pass by pretending not to hear. He stopped. Thinking the guy only wanted an autograph, he was soon surprised. The man began, "I met you over thirty years ago. I was about to drop out of high school. My parents thought it might help if I talked to you. They were right. I'm a lawyer now, and I just wanted to say thanks. "

Girardi said later he only had a tiny speck of a memory of that conversation—just a touch, very little, not much more. But as he continued his walk through the stadium he was stopped by another guy a little younger. This man said to Joe, "Twenty years ago I was diagnosed with cancer, and they thought I was terminal. You were with the Mets

back then and you dropped by to give me a pep talk. I never forgot it. And then when you became sick, Joe, I wished I could have told you, 'Thanks'."

In one of those moments we have all known, Girardi was unable to respond. Later, this is what he commented to the Washington Post. "We in sports," and I would say we in the church, "can do so much more if we just put a little effort into our connections with people." A pat on the back, a phone call, a good word here or there—these can have a tremendous effect on people. It's something I wish we could all be a little more aware of. What's it going to take for us to remember God's benevolent friendship toward us. What's it going to take for us to remember what it feels like to truly love Jesus more than anything else—and to have that love spill over because of all we've been given by God?

Pray that we are awakened long before that crucial moment in our lives, like that of David's when truly he was forgiven, but he lost forever a friendship and a connectedness that he would long for till his death.

Let us not wait too late. Let us go out and be who God has created us to be for one another. Amen.