

JESUS IS A LOYAL FRIEND
ASH WEDNESDAY

1 JOHN 1:8-9
FEB 10, 2016

⁸ If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. ⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

As I read articles on ministry, I continue to read about how important it is for men, and women, too, I am sure, to have a close circle of friends, sometimes called an accountability group, with whom they can share their real selves, their thoughts and struggles, & find encouragement, and also hard questions and frankness if they do wrong. I have never found this advice in so many words in Bible, except that Pastors should be this for their people, and the whole church is to be like this for each other, but I do wonder if this may have been kind of relationship the 12 disciples had with each other or at least paired teams had, like Elijah and Elisha, or Paul and Silas.

It occurs to me that this could be difficult or risky, to find a friend who truly cares about me more than self, one who, when we do share weakness or struggles, doesn't betray us and spread them, one who, when they know our faults, doesn't decide to avoid us.

A faithful husband or wife would be such a loyal friend, but our most loyal friend is not anyone but Jesus.

HUMAN FRIENDSHIP AND LOYALTY WAVERS
JESUS IS LOYAL TO WAVERING FRIENDS
JESUS LOYALLY BEFRIENDS US FOREVER

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Jesus' disciples were a loyal group.

They became his followers before he was famous.

They left even jobs and family for long periods

when wannabe disciples took care of business first

They stuck with him for years when others dropped out,

when Jesus said things that were hard to understand

or hard to take and many stopped following,

and Jesus asked if they were going to leave too,

Peter spoke for the rest, "to whom shall we go,

you have the words of eternal life."

But even Peter was not as loyal as he imagined he was.

He was sure that even if all the others abandoned Jesus,

he never would. He would even die with him.
We now know that wasn't true, not even close.
But he really thought it was.
As text says, he deceived himself & truth was not in him.
I think this is a reminder that the same is true of us.
When we say something that is not true,
the first one we deceive is ourselves.
We all have a natural aptitude for convincing ourselves
that we are smarter or nicer or more innocent
or more justified or more deserving that we really are.
It is harder to see our own faults and failures
that it is to see our own face.
The only way to do it is to study carefully God's law.
This is why I think if you had asked even Judas
if he was a loyal friend of Jesus, he may have said yes.
As clear as it is to us and Jesus that he is doing wrong,
he found a way to justify it for himself and even
betray Jesus with a kiss as if still a dear friend.
Here again, let us use him as a mirror and recognize
that we too may claim we value one thing with our words
but our actions may betray the opposite.
We may say we care about or love someone
but act as if we care about and love ourselves.
We may say we love and trust in Jesus
but how we use time and money shows other priorities.
Like Judas and Peter, we may really intend to be Jesus' friend
but find that fear or desires or doubts cause us to waver.
Yet, what we see in our text is that

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he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins

Judas may try to deny to himself that he is doing wrong
but Jesus knows exactly what he is doing and why.
So, does he reject, avoid and hate him?
No, he does the opposite.
He points out in plain words what he is doing,
yet without openly shaming him.
He expresses deep regret for what he is doing,
not because of how Jesus will suffer
which he knows has to happen.
but because of the effect on Judas himself,
it would be better for him if he hadn't been born.
He never stops trying to dissuade him and turn him
to repentance and forgiveness, even when not possible.
We see the same thing with Peter later.
He warns Peter exactly what will happen in his denial.

He encourages Peter to pray to resist temptation,
and promises to pray for him.
He even assures Peter ahead of time
that he will be restored in the end.
so that he does not totally despair like Judas.
He strengthens all the disciples by giving them
his own body and blood in the Lord's Supper,
the strongest antidote against sin and shame
even when he knows full well how they will hurt him.
He does the same for us.
As Psal. 103 says, he has compassion on us
because he remembers that we are but dust.
He knows how each of us will sin but still loves us.
As Paul writes to the Corinthians,
God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted
beyond your ability, but with the temptation he will also
provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it.
He also warns us, encourages us, holds us back,
and assures us of renewal.
Although we waver so much, he never gives up on us.

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⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

Jesus keeps his promise of renewal and forgiveness for Peter
because he carries out his promised plan to die for us.
Even before God created the world, before eternity,
he knew that we would sin and so already then
he planned that Jesus would suffer and die for us.
For centuries he worked out this plan.
Even when those he chose to be part of it constantly failed
he did not give up on them.
Knowing full well what it would mean, that even those
he was doing it all for would turn against him,
Jesus faithfully fulfilled his mission to suffer and die for us.
He did not stutter or stop short because of fear.
He did not change the plan for selfish purposes.
He did not try a shortcut or an easy way out.
He was faithful because of his loyal love for us.
This is how we can be sure that he will continue
to be loyally faithful to us forever,
and that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.
As Paul wrote to the Thessalonians,
Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely,
and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless
at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it.
He will continue to warn us of danger and
strengthen us with his word to resist temptation.
He will continue to call us to repentance when we fall.
He will continue to forgive us whenever we repent.
He continues to offer this to us in Holy Communion
just as he did for his first failing friends.
He will continue to keep his promise of a place for us
in heaven forever.

HUMAN FRIENDSHIP AND LOYALTY WAVERS

This was true for all the disciples and is true for us.

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As kept trying to help Judas and Peter
even when he knew they were failing him,
he will not give up on us.

JESUS LOYALLY BEFRIENDS US FOREVER

As with us and for us all the way to death and beyond
we can sure he will loyally befriend us
all the way through our life and beyond.