

Homecoming is right around the corner. I remember 25 years ago being asked by my future best friend to come home from the University of Pittsburgh to take her to homecoming. It was only a few weeks after 9/11, and the DJ that the school hired didn't really provide a homecoming vibe. This older man began the night with Lee Greenwood's *Proud to be an American*. And then for the next hour played it again about every other song. Few were dancing and it was not fun. I was in a band and we also DJ'ed. I called my best friend. He loaded the van full of our equipment, and I politely asked the DJ if we could select some songs. He acquiesced because I don't think he wanted to be there. The DJ wasn't rebelling, he was distracted. Our greatest challenge for most things in life, especially faith, is not rebellion but distraction.

Think of your own spiritual life. Many of us don't rebel against God, our spouses, our jobs, our friends, we get distracted. I believe John 15 is one of the most important teachings of Jesus in all the Bible. Jesus teaches that He wants His joy to be in us and for our joy to be complete. Jesus doesn't want servants. Jesus wants friendship with you!

John 15:12-17

Friendship is a conscious choice. If you are looking at faith as another responsibility to manage as opposed to a renewing friendship you are missing the point. As I taught confirmation class last week, I asked a few questions: Why are you here? Why do we exist? What is the meaning of life? What is the Bible? What is confirmation?

The reason those kiddos are in confirmation class is because at baptism their parents made a promise to God and to the Church to teach them the faith of Jesus Christ. The students will confirm their parent's promise, but they will also confirm that they are actively choosing to enter friendship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior.

But they don't have to make that choice. God gives us freedom to choose our own way. Jesus tells the good news like this, "Once there was this generous Father with two sons. The younger son told his dad to drop-dead and demanded his inheritance. He would rather have the money than be in friendship with his dad. The generous Father gave it to him. The son went his own way to figure out life and wasted all the money in casinos and parties. This Jewish man hit rock bottom finding himself feeding pigs! Jews find pigs disgusting and this guy was now a slave to pigs. He thought to himself, 'All I need to do is ask for my Father's forgiveness and even if he makes me one of his servants, I will be better off than feeding pigs!' So, he repented. He changed his mind. He had a spiritual awakening and turned around back to his Father. And guess what his Father was doing? He was waiting with arms wide open to welcome His son!"

The word "repent" in Greek, *metanoia*, is the combination of two Greek words *meta* which means "change or after", as in *metamorphosis* or *metaphysics* and *nous* which means "mind." We often translate *metanoia* as "repent," but when the Bible uses this Greek word it means a transformative change in mind, a spiritual moral awakening, a turning around in the complete opposite direction.



Newlonsburg Presbyterian Church

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This son who wasted his Father's generosity changed his mind, he turned around and headed back to his Father. Here is the good news of Jesus: even if our confirmands choose not to follow Jesus and go their own way, the good news is Jesus awaits with arms wide open praying for friendship with them.

Once you have this spiritual moral awakening, then you begin to live Heaven on Earth, you begin deepening friendship with Jesus Christ and Christ's Church.

Our challenge this week: choose one distraction each day to be replaced by prayer or memorizing a lesson from Jesus. Memorization is good for the mind and soul. Choose a favorite scripture and memorize it. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." -Philippians 4:13 "Do not worry about tomorrow. Seek first Christ's Community and God's righteousness." -Matthew 6:33-34 Read the Prodigal Son story (Luke 15) and recite it in Spirit, not word for word. Read the Good Samaritan (Luke 10) and recite it in Spirit, not word for word. Read the feeding of the 5000 (John 6) and recite it in Spirit, not word for word.

Our theme for September is how to hear the Voice of Jesus through all the noise. You will hear Jesus most clearly when you deepen your friendship with Jesus through reading His story.

Jesus teaches us today that He is the Vine. We are the branches. Live into Jesus as He lives into you. Fruit is produced by tending to the garden, not by rushing.

Friendship is a conscious choice. Jesus prays for you right now to enter friendship with Him. Jesus wants nothing more for you. Do you desire friendship with Jesus Christ? Do you desire joy? Moral direction? To live Heaven on Earth? Jesus doesn't want servants. Jesus wants friendship with you!

For the glory of God and the betterment of humanity,
Pastor Curtis

Theme: God's voice is heard most clearly when deepening friendship with Jesus.

Sermon Notes:

1. Our greatest challenge is often distraction not rebellion.
2. Many look at faith as another responsibility to manage as opposed to a renewing friendship.
3. Choose one distraction this week each day to be replaced by prayer or memorizing a lesson from Jesus.
4. Fruit is produced by tending to the garden, not by rushing.