

Friends Together

Jesus speaks heartfelt words to the disciples, encouraging them to band together as a strong community grounded in God's ways. From these early followers, the church emerges. Following the lead of these first disciples, we continue look to Jesus the Christ as our beloved and loving friend who leads us as we continue to witness to the gospel in word and deed.

Focus Scripture: John 15:9–17

With the focus passage, we continue in the section of the gospel of John traditionally known as the "farewell discourse" (John 14:1–16:33). In these speeches – which immediately follow the act of washing the disciples' feet on the night of Jesus' arrest – Jesus teaches about his mission. In the farewell discourse, Jesus speaks in images that recall teachings recorded earlier in the gospel of John. These images would have been understood by the disciples. It is good to keep this in mind, especially when reading just one section of the discourse. Two points that come up in the focus passage draw on earlier references – Jesus' description of the disciples as servants and the metaphor of the vine.

Again, Jesus calls the disciples: "abide in my love." Another translation of the Greek word for "abide" is "remain." From previous verses, we know that the disciples are the branches, connected to the central vine, Jesus. As disciples follow the commandments that Jesus gives, they remain firmly grounded in Jesus' love. The fruit that the disciples are called to bear – love – is demonstrated in the foot washing in 13:5.

In contrast to the description of their relationship in the former image of "servants and master" (John 13:16), Jesus refers to the disciples as "friends" (15:15). A more literal translation of the Greek word here is "loved ones." Jesus has shared everything that he knows with the disciples, forging a relationship that is intertwined with God's abiding presence. Within God's love, Jesus and the disciples are friends together.

The disciples referred to in the farewell discourse are not numbered or named. This extends Jesus' call to love to all who follow Jesus. The abiding presence of Christ is good

news for disciples in every age. As we love each other, we experience the love of Jesus for us – a love as full as the love of God for Jesus.

The focus passage brings us back to the night of Jesus' arrest when the church year is in the midst of celebrating the Resurrection. Why? Jesus' farewell discourse is a word of encouragement to the community about carrying on the work of discipleship. As with these early followers, Christ is present with us as a friend who calls and equips us to work together to share God's love.

The themes of John's gospel are echoed in the letters of John. In 1 John 5:1–6, the focus is on Jesus' command to love. This command cannot be understood apart from the relationship between God and Jesus and between Jesus and believers. Love for others comes from loving God and following in God's ways.

In Acts 10:44–48, we find Peter in Caesarea in the home of the Roman centurion, Cornelius. Earlier, Peter is challenged by God to think beyond preconceptions (10:10–16). Now, Peter grasps the radical notion that God's love moves beyond human barriers. If any have received the Spirit, then they are already members of the emerging church and should be baptized.

Psalm 98 calls all of creation to join a new song, celebrating God's presence. God's faithfulness and steadfast love will be known by all.

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To be called "friend" or "loved one" by Jesus the Christ invites reflection on one's relationship with God; it commands a personal response. What does it mean to you that Jesus calls you friend? How do such friends support one another as the community that is the Body of Christ?

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Focus Scripture
John 15:9–17

Additional Scriptures
Acts 10:44–48
Psalm 98
1 John 5:1–6

God of love, in you
we abide. In you
we find our ground
for growing as
a community
of disciples,
seeking to know
and do your will.
Strengthen us to
follow in Jesus'
footsteps, loving
others as you have
loved us.
Amen.

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www.spiritseasons.com
to access Spirit Sightings
for connections between
current events and the
focus passage.

