

Has the Church Forgotten God's Design for Friendship?

Friendship is not an obsolete sentiment. It is still necessary to our life in its largest sense. There is possible today, as ever, a generous friendship that forgets self.

Christ, who always took the highest ground in His estimate of people and never once put man's capacity for the noble on a low level, made the high-water mark of human friendship the standard of His own great action: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13, KJV).

This high-water mark has often been reached. People have given themselves to each other with nothing to gain, with no self-interest to serve, and with no holding back part of the price. It is false to history to base life on selfishness, to leave out of the list of human motives the highest of all. The miracle of friendship has been too often enacted on this dull earth of ours to cause us to doubt either its possibility or its wondrous beauty.

The relationship between David and Jonathan represents God's design for friendship. They met, and at the meeting, knew each other to be nearer than brothers. By subtle elective affinity, they felt that they belonged to each other. Out of all the chaos of the time and the disorder of their lives, there arose for these two souls a new and beautiful world where there reigned peace, love and sweet content.

Jonathan forgot his pride, and David his ambition. It was as if the smile of God changed the world for them. It saved one of them from the temptations of a squalid court, and the other from the sourness of an exile's life. Jonathan's princely soul had no room for envy or jealousy. David's frank nature rose to

meet the magnanimity of his friend.

In the kingdom of love, there was no disparity between the king's son and the shepherd boy. Such a gift as each gave and received is not to be bought or sold. It was the fruit of the innate nobility of both; it softened and tempered a very trying time for both. Jonathan withstood his father's anger to shield his friend; David was patient with Saul for his son's sake. They agreed to be true to each other in their difficult position.

Close and tender must have been the bond, which had such fruit in princely generosity and mutual loyalty of soul. Fitting was the beautiful lament, when David's heart was bereaved at tragic Gilboa: "I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan; very pleasant hast thou been unto me; thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women" (2 Sam. 1:26). Love is always wonderful, a new creation, fair and fresh to every loving soul. It is the miracle of spring to the cold, dull earth.

The joy that comes from a true communion of heart with another is perhaps one of the purest and greatest in the world, but its function is not exhausted by merely giving pleasure. Although we may not be conscious of it, there is a deeper purpose in it, an education in the highest arts of living. We may be enticed by the pleasure it affords, but its greatest good is got by the way. Even intellectually it means the opening of a door into the mystery of life.

Only love understands after all. It gives insight. We cannot truly know anything without sympathy, without getting out of self and entering into others.

If we look without love, we can see only the outside, the mere form and expression of the subject studied. Only with tender compassion and loving sympathy can we see the beauty even in the eye dull with weeping and in the fixed face pale with

care.

The divine meaning of true friendship is that it is often the first unveiling of the secret of love. It is not an end in itself, but has most of its worth in what it leads to, the priceless gift of seeing with the heart rather than with the eyes. To love one soul for its beauty and grace and truth is to open the way to appreciate all beautiful and true and gracious souls, and to recognize spiritual beauty wherever it is seen. {eoa}

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