

*John 15: 1-17**Micah 4:1-5*

One of the earliest lessons of life that I learned happened when I was about 9 years old and a member of our Junior School football team. One Saturday morning we played a team from another school, won 7-0, and I scored three goals. So, as you can imagine, I was feeling great as we came off the pitch.

However, our P.E. teacher (and team coach) brought me down to earth at the end of the match when he told me I would not be in the team the following week. When I asked why, he explained that I had been picked as a defender not an attacker: it was not my job to **score** goals but to stop them **being scored** against my team. The following week, to drive the lesson home, I was not picked and had to watch from the sidelines. I had not done the job I'd been given.

Have **you** ever been selected to play for a team or to represent your school or the firm you worked for, for a sports team, at a trade fair or in negotiations? You are chosen because you can do certain things, have acquired some expertise or knowledge and have something useful to contribute. Nevertheless, you do not choose but are chosen. You can try to earn your place, but **you** cannot choose to be in the team. Jesus tells his disciples, '**You did not choose me but I chose you**'.

We are asked to **respond**: to say whether or not we want to be part of his ministry, and to have a relationship with him. It's then up to us whether we accept his invitation, or make our excuses and look for other ways to satisfy our own needs.

Out of his love and grace God has called us and, in today's Gospel Reading we begin to see what such a calling implies. **Firstly**, we are chosen for **joy**. '**If you keep my commandments you will abide in my love**'. Whether life is difficult or easy, we are called to 'rejoice in the Lord'. As Christians, we are people of joy, as we know that God has called us and is **with** us, and no-one can take this away from us. We have been **chosen**, we are **loved** and we have an **eternal** destiny. What's to be sad about!

Secondly, we are chosen for **love**. Jesus gives us an awareness, an understanding of his Father's love - and he gives us his own love. What greater love can there be than his laying down his life for us? We are called to respond to the love he expressed on the cross by loving him and by loving one another. '**this is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you**'.

We are chosen to be **friends of Jesus**: '**I do not call you servants(slaves) any longer; I have called you friends**'. While within the culture of the time, it was looked on as an honour to be called servants of God, Jesus has called us to a far greater privilege- we are to be his **friends** and friends of God. Servants had to do as their master commanded them, often without knowing why, whereas Jesus had made known to his disciples everything he had heard from his Father.

And we have immediate access to our friend Jesus; we are able to enter into his presence whenever we want, for he has promised to be **always** with us. But with our privileges come responsibilities. '**I appointed you to go and bear fruit,**

fruit that will last. So we must learn to 'go for Jesus' - to share in his outreach and mission. To bear lasting fruit and to be his ambassadors. **We know** what he has done for us, how he has intervened in our own lives. So we are his witnesses and witnesses to the riches of his glory, and we are to show, by the way we live, that it is a joy to be a friend of God, and to love as he loves us.

But however strenuous our own efforts to live as Jesus wishes us to, how do we know if we are fulfilling Christ's great command that we love one another? The example that Jesus gives- of his own willingness to die for his friends- is certainly not a comforting one, yet the Gospel says it may be the ultimate measure of our love.

We may not be called to lay down our life on the battlefield, as so many have done when called to defend their country, but how many of you have had effectively to put your own life 'on hold' when caring for a sick loved one or neighbour -or when your children are in dire straits? We 'die to self' and serve God by living for others.

But there are indications in this passage from John which suggest that, as we go through life, there are other ways to check whether we are following Christ's great commandment. **'I have called you friends,** he says, **'because I have made known to you everything that I heard from my Father'**. The sharing that characterises Father and Son is extended to us.

We are not simply given instructions that we must follow blindly. Instead we are invited to God's table, to eat and to discuss, and share in, his great plan for his création. So one mark of our love for one another and for God, will be our willingness to extend this invitation to others. 'Come, join us at God's table, and help us to work out with God what to do next.' If **God** makes friends not servants, so should we.

The second measure of our success at 'loving', that these verses in John suggest, is whether we are **'bearing fruit'**. Bringing others to share in the life and love of God will make **us** more loving. It's deeply challenging and rewarding to see the word of God at work in the lives of others, and to find that before our own efforts to help, God was already at work.

Christian leadership remains a privilège not a right. It still demands a double commitment - to the pattern of Christ's commands, and to the people of Christ's community. It has the **same targets: fruit that lasts**, helping people to find and develop a relationship with Christ. He has promised to be with us always. What a blessing! We do not have to **strive** for joy; that comes as God's gracious gift. **'I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy might be complete'**

As, in this period of Remembrance we remember the sacrifices made by so many for our freedom let's also remember the suprême sacrifice Christ made for us. However, he overcame death to show that in him nothing is impossible, and he has promised to be with us always. What greater freedom can there be than to have him as our friend.

We are to bear fruit; **fruit that lasts**. Let us accept Christ's gift of joy; love as he loves us, but be prepared to share our joy, with those who are still searching for him.