

Disciple Friend

Interesting words.

Merriam-Webster's online dictionary defines 'disciple' as:

noun: **disciple**; a personal follower of Jesus during his life, especially one of the twelve Apostles; a follower or student of a teacher, leader, or philosopher.

And Merriam-Webster's take on friend:

a : one attached to another by affection or esteem

2a : one that is not hostile

b : one that is of the same nation, party, or group

3: one that favors or promotes something (such as a charity)

4: a favored companion

Compare these words with their definitions in the Urban Dictionary online:

disciple: A term originally referring to the followers of Christ Jesus. They were frequently referred to as the brothers. **Just** as your "brothers" are your posse and are always near you, so also Jesus' posse was always with him--learning and growing from what he had to say. Now, the term can refer to anyone who follows the teachings of another. It is a word that combines the definitions of student and follower.

The Urban Dictionary online says that

A friend is someone you **love** and who loves you, someone you **respect** and who respects you, someone whom you trust and who trusts you. A friend is honest and makes you want to be honest, too. A friend is loyal.

A friend is someone who is **happy** to spend **time** with you doing absolutely nothing at all; someone who doesn't mind driving you on **stupid** errands, who **will** get up at midnight just because you want to **go** on an adventure, and who doesn't have to talk to communicate with you.

A friend is someone who not only doesn't care if you're ugly or boring, but doesn't **even think** about it; someone who forgives you no matter what you do, and someone who tries to help you even when they don't know how. A friend is someone who tells you if you're being stupid, but who doesn't **make** you feel stupid.

A friend is someone who would sacrifice their **life** and happiness for you. A friend is someone who will come with you when you have to do boring things like watch **bad** recitals, go to stuffy parties, or wait in boring lobbies. You don't even think about who's **talking** or who's listening in a conversation with a friend.

A friend is someone for whom you're willing to change your

opinions. A friend is someone you look forward to seeing and who looks forward to seeing you: someone you like so **much**, it doesn't matter if you share interests or traits. A friend is someone you like so much, you start to like the things they like.

A friend is a **partner**, not a leader or a follower.

What a friend we have in Jesus, as they say!

In my mind there is a significant difference between being someone's disciple and being someone's friend. I believe these dictionary definitions signal that difference. I think its harder to be a friend than a disciple.

To be a disciple, a student, a follower, means that there are clear expectations. The teacher teaches, the student learns. When you have gotten everything out of teacher/student relationship, you move on – the teacher to the next student; the student to the next teacher. The disciple relationship may be 'friendly' but friendship rarely occurs. For good reason, certain professional boundaries exist to keep friendship at arm's length. An awareness of power dynamics provides important boundaries in our #metoo world. This is a good thing.

Friendship pushes those boundaries. Friendship invites two people to go beyond the teacher/student roles. Friends want to know about one another. Friends want to share with one another. Bumper sticker theology says that a real friend is someone who knows everything about you and loves you anyway.

We get confused about friendship these days. Facebook allows us to ‘unfriend’ people with a mouse click. The American English language makes acquaintance and friend nearly synonymous. In our hearts, we know they are not.

Unless you have serious boundary issues, (or you decide to make a confession to the person in a collar sitting next to you on a plane), you do not spill your guts to just anyone you meet. It is inappropriate. Acquaintances may develop into friendship over time, but you don’t build a friendship in a day.

When Jesus calls his disciples friends, he is inviting them into a deeper relationship with him. He says to them that he wants more from them. He wants them to trust him with their stories. Most of all, he wants to be able to trust them with HIS story. Jesus invited them, and invites us now, into a deep relationship – a relationship that is incarnational and bodily; a relationship that is extraordinarily intimate, but not sexual; a relationship that makes the love of God real in this world.

In my heart I believe that real, true, deep friendship is sacramental. It is so precious and holy that to need to end such a relationship is tantamount to ripping your soul to pieces. Sacramental friendship often needs no words. You either know what the other person is already thinking or saying or you know that person just needs to know you are there. The silence between you takes care of everything.

In my life I would say that I have sacramental friendships with just a handful of people. They are my inner circle with whom I trust my life and my soul. I have plenty of other types of relationships that I would consider friendship, but not that deep sacramental type. In those sacramental relationships I have a glimpse of what friendship Jesus wishes for us all.

In God's dominion, there would be no need for #metoo because everyone would regard their neighbors as equal inheritors of the kingdom. We would all trust each other. We would all respect each other. We're not there. Yet, Jesus invites us to take the next step....be his friend.

It's a bold step.

Friendship with Jesus requires us to drop whatever boundaries we have put in place to protect our hearts and feelings. It requires us to trust Jesus completely. It means that Jesus is trusting US completely. It means we know and understand that once we accept his invitation our lives will never be the same. And, we don't know what that will look like. We just have to trust our friend to be with us through it all.

Are you ready to be a friend of Jesus?

Are you ready to be his partner?

Are you ready for an adventure?