

Nora Church Sermon
Feb 28th 2010
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Friendship Through Difference and Difficulty

While I was looking to start writing this sermon I realized that the past three years I have spoken here I have centered on connection. The 1st time I spoke it was about connecting to one's higher self. Last year I decided to speak on personal connection to God and one's Faith. This time I am speaking on the last important piece of connection and that is to one another.

I consider myself a fairly connected person, especially when it comes to emailing. I am one of those people who get all the email forwards that are currently circulating around the entire united states of America. Like 13 a day. I get all the cheesy religious themed emails, emails about growling old & retiring (humpf!) also emails demanding that if I don't pass them onto 12 people in 12 seconds, that either my life will end or I won't be allowed in heaven or bad luck will follow for 7 years or suggests perhaps I have an empty life cause I must not have 12 friends to forward the message to. Because I am more like a forward dead-end I usually won't actually send any to my friends unless they happen to really be funny or otherwise worth while in my opinion. But One type of email I happen to get a lot of encouraged me to speak a bit on this particular topic of friendship today. That is of the stories people send me about unusual friendships made and documented, usually of the animal kingdom as those can be particularly odd sometimes. I got one recently about a hound dog and an orangutan, I read one about a man's special friendship with a certain 14 ft crocodile, who No one else can get close to I might add. Got me thinking that yes, friendship does come in all shapes & sizes and in unexpected ways. TO me these examples were symbols of how **we** can choose to get along through tough or trying circumstances by seeing into the core fabric of a person despite our differences, providing greater strength and flexibility to who are friends are and how we handle those varying relationships.

SO how do we utilize our states of friendship to bring enrichment to our lives and how does this affect who we are? Lets take a look at why we need each other. First of all the bond of friendship provides us with a more peace-filled existence if we do it right. No, is isn't that we can't have wild and crazy moments with friends but these relationships furnish a sense of calm in our lives because we know no matter what happens, we have someone to turn to who understands and wants to help. Also, time with friends gives us release from the current state of affairs in our lives. A friend shouldn't burden you with only loads and leans but rather lift you up too in part, even when they are the ones feeling down and out. By this I mean there should always be give and take, no friendship manifests as one way giving only. Friends show us that someone cares that we are here and impart to us a sense of security. We know we are not alone in this world but a person can easily live in a city of 2 million people and feel abandoned and isolated. Even having one friend to connect to is a great asset to our happiness and wellbeing.

Close connection with people isn't always easy and it's not necessarily meant to be. As we all have found out from little on, people are hard to get along with sometimes. Try to remember in your minds the last time you felt chided by a friend or found fault in someone you would call a friend? When you simplify the disagreement, ask yourself if it involved you not getting what you wanted out of the relationship somehow or if you felt that you weren't respected? Could you breakdown the situation enough to admit how perhaps something was taken too personally either by you or by your friend? Were the real intentions of a person words or actions benign yet still made up to be negative, supporting someone's decision to take offense? My point today is that offense is often unnecessary, clouding of the truth and demeaning to what nature has in store for real connection.

If you did some investigating into how people relate to one another, much of the time you'd notice **it is circumstances we are not aware of that dictate how another person acts toward us**. Whether it is their past family life, their current job, an illness, a bad day or a very busy schedule, people **rarely intend** to exact harm on a friendship. Rather life gets in the way and sometimes our expectations are out of sync with what is realistic for someone. Our job as an appreciative friend is to pause before reacting to perceived wrongdoing, focusing instead on developing our understanding into why people behave the way that they do. It takes effort to will the mind to not take personal offense. The heart stops at **I am hurt**, the mind at **what I can do about it**.

It's easy to forgive and forget a friend's behavior during awesomely difficult moments in that person's life which could have under normal conditions hurt you. But do we really know how to react to people especially when their difficulties give an underwhelming appearance? Sometimes one's need for understanding isn't written out on their face but rather hidden in the dark corners of a person's battle between their reality and their truth, the difference between who they are and who they long to be.

This point is for me a major guide post to my close relationships in general; **am I seeing only the person that is presenting themselves to me now or am I also taking into full account the person that he or she is capable of being**. Truth is I realize that to some, this seems ideological and vacant of reason...But it isn't. It is gathering the evidence I need to support this beautiful person's very best interest, and if that is your interest than this is important for you too. We should always keep in mind that **everyone wants better for themselves**, everyone. Seeing past the outside, the flippant, the undermining, and even hurtful characteristics common to many of us allows one to more clearly define who a person really is in his/ her best place, their best space. This is because we make it past the trash to the landscape of the heart where goodness, light, and a loving sensitivity combine to create the core (the spirit) in each person and it isn't hard to see. We could probably notice it in everyone if we get past old wounds or new judgments; **much of what we hang on another is truly capable of only sinking ourselves**.

I've sank many of my own battle ships by pretending to stand in the right over an issue that fell flat on its face the moment I used it to correct what I perceived wrong. To be honest and simple I find the most common error in dealing with others and especially those friends we hold dear, is our over identification with ego which makes us constantly ask, how much have I gotten out of the relationship and is it worth it for me to keep giving? That part of us that keeps count, keeps track, does not easily if at all let go of past circumstance, that part of us that is constantly checking to see if our interests are covered and if we

are happy enough. I'm sure we have all had experience with friendships that just didn't seem to work for some reason. Whatever the expectation that was there to begin with, it was not lived up to. Embroilment often causes us to lose sight of the person that we formed the bond of friendship with making their character out to be someone different. So then by choosing to just let your friend go you are freeing yourself from some sort of harm, always the wisest option. Or is it?

Friendship in difficult times can seem a challenge but look at it as a chance to learn and to survive during hostile relational climate change. Sometimes we forget that we can just **relax our own needs**, letting go of the feelings of hurt or the chance to feel right by proving another wrong. You can literally choose. Listen to the side of yourself telling you what you want to hear (most likely your ego stating that you NEED to feel righted) and then listen to the part of you that just wants to reach out, apologize, have it all done with, understand (most likely the part of you your ego wants to thrash). Notice the feelings of rage or unconcern over the other person's well being, does the feel of it connect you to the world or dislocate you? Where do you want to stand in judgment of yourself? Are you about to act on the kind of person you maybe have been or the person you are best as? What exactly is driving you?

Often times there is that exact moment in the pause between transgression and feeling transgressed, between crime and possible punishment, between hurt and taking offense. That right there is the moment you can take that pause and shove it down your throat and into your heart and sit a bit with it. Mean time walk away with a smile or half a smile and chew on the event as it truly is. Ask yourself those important questions. Was my intention to hurt? Was the other person's intention to hurt me? IS there a possible explanation that I am not aware of or that was not properly communicated? Do I NEED to speak about how I feel now or can I keep those feelings to myself and when ready disregard their pining for solace? In other words does it have to be my way or the highway or can I keep driving down this particular road?

I realize this example of how to relate to differences in friendship by learning when and how to communicate or not represents a transition for many of us. I still firmly believe that **you can say anything, it just depends on HOW you say it**. I'll share one statistic I have for you: ...communication consists of 7% content (words) 38% tone & 55% non-verbal (body language). So if you weren't aware of this now you know where to make your biggest improvements. But again before you decide to speak up about your anger or your stung feelings examine them. Teaching yourself to let it all out seems like a sign of the truth when in fact **the ego's ability to mask itself underneath the need to be heard is often a transference of blame and unhappiness on factors other than yourself**. Trapped in endless cycles of hurt between one another we forget to appreciate what is truly important. Rodney King said it best in his famous quote "Can't we all just get along?"

I am going to reach out here a moment and ask you to pause and measure how much of two essential life ingredients you feel you have your life, they are **Love and Worth**. Is what you feel you've been bestowed enough? The conflicts and resolutions we encounter when dealing with others often revolve around those two feelings of Love and Worth. If we do not receive them in proper personal amounts especially from those we most cherish (and those amounts can seem to vary from person to person), we begin to perceive lack, which seeds itself as self esteem problems waiting to blossom.

I do happen to have a friend who I would like to mention at this point. HE is strong willed, funny and loving at the same time very heavy and occasionally quite hard for me to deal with. There have been several times I have asked myself why I put up with this relationship as it is. Why don't I completely give up or at the least lay the strictest of rules out so as to make it more tolerable for me at the hardest points. The fact is I do love this person. I see the light inside shine tremendously and I know from my highest level of judgment that **if I want to be a real friend, I will not shut down during the difficult moments but rather look to that light and keep focused on it.** During the hard moments, I'll quickly recall all that we have been thru over the years and take joy from how far this person truly has come. I notice the big difference friends like me have made for him. Life has proved hard for my friend and I understand it had been difficult for him to maintain friendship in the past. Still, by hanging on through the challenging moments, I have provided that stability he needed to know that YES indeed **he is worthy of love** and that he CAN and HAS indeed made deep, real connections with others who take seriously the challenge of authentic friendship, seeing past the cracking facade to experience and uplift the core, witnessing the person he means to be and quietly driving him to become it.

I don't know anyone that doesn't have an underlying NEED to feel loved. I don't know anyone who doesn't have a NEED to feel self worth. Above all else those are the two things that come to mind that we as humans ask of this life. Feeling cared for and understood all come down to those two essential life ingredients. Am I needed here, do others besides me feel my worth or am I feeling worthless and not needed? Does someone besides me love the person who I am? Do I feel loved here on this planet in my small and seemingly insignificant life? I believe as with anything true of friendship the giver is the receiver. No matter what you have the ability to sow you will often reap most in choosing to benefit humankind and progress, over the stability of your own ego. It isn't that hard to show someone Love and Support in friendship...just be there, over anything else, it's that simple.

Asking yourself to participate in a higher level of connection is one that needs no return except of Love and genuine Joy in another's spirit. If you can say that about a friend, you've got one. We can honor the roles people are put here to play in our lives recognizing the use of friendships not meant to be perfect but to seem terribly trying at times. Even during the gravest differences, we can acknowledge that seemingly **impossible relationships can actually be the most fruitful in learning to get past our own shortcomings.** Why should we worry that we can be a very jealous person for example, unless a friend comes into our lives who triggers that in us, shedding light on our own shadowy feelings. If we have much anger built up, it is the friend that sets us off sometimes in just the right way to let our release button get a chance to be pushed. Honoring these qualities whether you find them desirable or not is a good way to look at those around you, unveiling the higher purpose behind the people that become part of our lives. Let us be thankful instead of resentful.

"The greatness that each and everyone of us holds is insurmountable and powerful," This is the saying we always use where I attend service to lead into our communion piece. My hope is that we can remember these words the next time we seek to turn our backs on someone. Let us question the importance of our own responses and see to it that we are keeping the persons **best possible self** in mind. I am not saying you should never shift your perspective of friendship with a person, doing so may help to salvage the relationship but the real ideal here is to love a person right thru to their core despite

the possibility that he/she might continue to grate on your from time to time. Even if the ongoing friendship subsides overtime, learn to appreciate the person for what you did exchange in love and learning, in good times and in bad. We are all here to gain personal ground and one of ways to do that is to accept people for who they are and where they are at, never losing sight that **our greatest gift is to is to nurture another's greatest potential.**

Email Closing (*Because I started out talking about email forwards, I thought I would include one sent to me during the writing of this sermon because its pertinent to what I am saying...It reads*)

I'm sending this to you to see how many actually read their email...Your response will be interesting. Pay attention to what you read. After you have finished reading it, you will know the reason it was sent to you...Here Goes:

People come into your life for a reason, a season or a lifetime. When you know which one it is, you will know what to do for that person.

When someone is in your life for a Reason, it is usually to meet a need you have expressed. They have come to assist you through a difficulty, to provide you with guidance and support, to aid you physically, emotionally or spiritually. They may seem like a godsend and they are. They are there for the reason you need them to be. Then without any wrongdoing on your part or at an inconvenient time, this person will say or do something to bring the relationship to an end. What we must realize is that our need has been met, our desire fulfilled, their work is done and now it is time to move on.

Some people come into your life for a season, because your turn has come to share, grow, or learn together. They bring you an experience of peace or make you laugh. They may teach you something you have never done. They usually give you an unbelievable amount of joy. Believe it, it is real. But only for a season.

Life Time **friendships** teach you lifetime lessons, things you must build upon in order to have a solid emotional foundation. Your job is to accept the lessons, love the person and put what you have learned to use in all other relationships and areas of your life. It is said that love is blind but friendship is clairvoyant.

Thank you for being a part of my life whether you were a reason, a season or a lifetime.

Now...send this to every friend that you have on-line including the person who sent it to you.

0 replies= you may need to work on your 'people skills'

2 replies= you are nice but probably need to be more outgoing

4 replies= you have picked your friends well

6 replies= you are downright popular

8 replies or more- you are totally awesome and that's probably why your on my list.