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The Rev. Garrett Lane (05/05/2024, The Sixth Sunday of Easter)

Let us pray, Almighty God, may the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

There is a 1982 film that played heavily on television, I am told, and it's not in my lines, but it just came to me. Some of you have probably not had the pleasure of seeing this film.

I have, so let me tell you about it. It is called Savannah Smiles.

Maybe some of you,

okay, some nods, good. If you haven't seen it, it's a really good film. It's a fun film.

It's a silly film that also has some really deep and profound moments.

In this film, Mark Miller,

who wrote, directed, and starred in it, kind of like Andrew in what we do here.

He stars in this film as Alvi, who is a man who has escaped prison.

He's been broken out.

He's kind of living on the lamb, and he's with his friend. He's broken out of prison,

and there's this line. He's like, I was going to be paroled on Friday, and he gets out on like a

Thursday or something. They're driving this car in Utah, and this little girl runs away from

home, Savannah. As they are away from their car, she hops in the back seat, and Miles later,

they discover that they've kidnapped a girl, more or less. You've seen a movie like that,

if you haven't seen this movie, where these hardened criminals and Alvi, who is a runaway

himself and has not had people in his own life that are like parents, fall in love with this little

girl in a really kind of heartwarming made for TV kind of way. They discover, while they're

getting to know Savannah, that her dad is a wealthy man, and there's a \$100,000 reward for anyone

that can bring her back to her dad. They decide, well, we're going to try to get this money, but we

need to do it in a way where it doesn't look like we kidnapped this girl. Alvi, as the movie kind of

goes on, learns to love Savannah and fill in in kind of an absent in a way that her father is not

able to. At the end of the film, everything kind of goes poorly, as you would expect. The police

think they've kidnapped her. They're on Alvi, and it comes to this point in the movie where they're surrounded by these men with rifles on a river. And Alvi carries Savannah to her people. He's giving her back to her family. And right after he gives Savannah back, he's sitting there in the middle of this river, guns all around, and they know that he has a gun somewhere on him too. So it's this really tense scene. And Pat Marita, who you know from maybe happy days as Alvin or probably Mr. Miyagi in the karate kid, is a priest in this film. And earlier in the film, he had been kind of taken hostage briefly, used as a getaway driver. And so this priest shows up and rushes down to Alvi in the river. And he turns to Alvi, and he says Alvi, I'm here, I'm here. And there's a long pause. He says, I'm your friend. And Alvi goes, I could use a friend right now. And he hands him his unloaded weapon. And the men that were standing and pointing guns, as soon as he takes out the gun, drop to position. And there's like a little sound, it gets even more tense. And the guns are drawn. And this man, who says that he is the friend of Alvi, puts himself in front of these guns and gets close to him and walks him out of the situation. I could use a friend, come close to me. There's a power in realizing that someone is your friend. If you've ever been in a situation, hopefully not a situation like that. But if you've ever been in a situation where you need a friend, where you need someone's couch to crash on, because yours is flooded. The friend you call when you have to call someone because things are really going poorly with your spouse at home. And you need to crash on someone's couch. That's a hard call. This moment, though, when you get to have a friend, and when you know that a friend is there for you, and you can call them, is powerful. When you know that someone's on your side and willing to do what it takes to see you through. And if it isn't this scene, you've seen Star Wars, Han Solo shows up when the Death Star is getting blown up, Sam Gamji waits, and helps Frodo. Like, you've seen this in film if not this film. And there's something about hearing those words, though, out loud, that you have a friend. And we hear it in our gospel reading today. The passage in John lets us walk into this scene where Jesus is talking to his disciples. He's teaching them. He's kind of talking about all of life

in these few chapters in John that sit together. And in chapter 15, verse 9, part of what we heard today, he has one of the most foundational sentences for the Christian faith and for all of humanity. As the Father has loved me, so I love you. And it launches him into a discussion that ends up kind of in a friend, ends up with him saying, I'm your friend, you are my friend. This great love that all of the acts of God and the Old Testament and the New Testament in our daily lives, all of these acts of love and acts of God that we see and experience and read about are tied into as the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. This outpouring, this overflowing of love that happens between God and God's self is what some theologians talk about, how creation comes into existence. Through the love that the Trinity has, the self giving love that God has for humanity and God's self, creation kind of just springs up like a spring. And we exist in this world. The disciples hear this from Christ that the same love that was at the foundations of the world, that is at the foundations of creation, reaches to them, reaches to all of humanity through Jesus Christ. Christ tells his followers, love one another as I have loved you. He tells them they does not call them servants, slaves even, but he calls them friends. This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer because a servant does not know what the Master is doing, but I have called you friends because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me, but I chose you. Christ the friend gives us the love that comes from God, the love that he knows he has given to us, he has given to his disciples, he has given to his followers, and this love comes from God. That is what we need from Jesus, not to hear that we are a servant or in some translations that you are a slave, that you are following these commands from Christ, but not really knowing why you are doing them. Why should I love others because someone tells me to? The love that Christ gives us in telling us that we are not servants, but friends shows us this love from God, and there is a song that I would hear growing up frequently. What a friend we have in Jesus. You know

this, you know this hymn, it is an oldy and a goody indeed. All our sins and grieves to bear, griefs to bear is one line. That line from that hymn reminds me of this, Christ as our friend, and maybe you are alone grieving the loss of someone, grieving some kind of change that is happening in your world. Maybe it comes even as you have a child at home that is growing up and you are grieving the newborn that you used to have. These griefs we have, maybe you have the weight of the worst decisions that you have ever made that have happened in the last six months or the last year, and it is heavy on you. It racked with guilt, it racked with shame. You have had to call that friend that I was talking about earlier. Maybe you are holding onto that 10-year grudge or someone you love is holding onto that 10-year, 15-year, 50-year grudge. The good word that we hear from Christ today is that whatever ledger you are working with, keeping track against yourself, keeping all of the wrongs of yourself and others, you can go ahead and burn it. What Christ has completed on this cross, what he has done on that cross, has already burned all of our ledgers for us. We have the same impulses that ancient people had when we think about God. We think of God as someone to serve, as this master that we have to do all of the things in order to get the Ataboy in order to get the thing that is promised to us, that God is waiting to crush us. And in reality, God tells us to rest in love, to rest in friendship. The God that we serve is not a God that comes down and uses people for his own benefit, like the Greek gods, like the gods of Babylon. We still have the same impulses that all of these ancient people have when we think about God. God is, we are here to serve God and to be used. And that is not what we are given in this passage. That is not what Christ gives us. There's this icon from the 8th century. It's a little hard to see. It's cracked into places. And it sits in France. It's in Paris in the Louvre. If you've ever, I don't actually know if you would have seen it. It's like two feet by two feet, so it's not small. But if you ever, ever there, I encourage you to find it. It's a, it's a coptic icon. So it comes from Egypt, where the coptic church is kind of located. And this ancient monastery from the 8th century, when it was, archaeologists in like the 20s found this as well as other icons. And for a

while, they didn't know what to do with it. I don't know if you're able to see. Jesus is putting his arm around this person. You can kind of see his fingers on his, on his friend. And colloquially, this is called Christ and his friend. And for many decades, it was called Christ and his friend. Even though we have this guy's name right there on, on the wood, but Christ and his friend, he's putting his arm around him. And it, it is not the typical icon that we usually see with Christ glorified or distant from other people, but putting his arm around someone. I do not call you servants. I call you friends. He touches this man, this abbot, and puts his arm around him. Another, another abbot from a different century says that friendship bears fruit, calling back this passage that we just read about the fruit we bear. Friendship bears fruit in our present life as well as the life to come. The friendship that we have that we enjoy with others is a gift from God, is a part of the love of God that is given to us in Christ. And it bears fruit in our present life and in the next. The two things that we hear in the passage early on today abide with me, stay with me, love and love one another are not two things, but are one thing as shown in the way that Jesus tells us he is our friend. Two sides of the same coin. And it is in this way that we participate in what Christ is doing in our world. In this ongoing surprise of hearing I'm on your side and I'm your friend. Christ is our friend. Christ our friend not like the old gods is for us. Christ is not against us. Take comfort in that today. I'll just pray. Almighty God you have given us grace at all times to know your son and to know him in the bread and in the wine and in baptism. Teach us Lord the way to love others. Teach us to love as Christ has loved us. And pray all these things in your son's holy name. Amen.