

"SUCH A FRIEND"

A Sermon By

Philip A. C. Clarke

Park Avenue United Methodist Church
106 East 86th Street
New York, New York 10028
September 25, 1994

"SUCH A FRIEND"

INTRODUCTION

A student nurse was assigned to the care of a young man who had been stricken with a paralyzing disease. He had lost his ability to speak, although his understanding and his intelligence were OK. The student nurse was determined to keep him cheerful. Day in and day out she would talk to him...sharing the latest scores, the latest movies, talk about the weather and the classmate who fell in love and eloped...and on and on and on.

Months later the student nurse received an invitation to his doctor's office....a summons to "see what progress her ex-patient had made". His speech therapist explained that she had been invited to hear the first words her patient had spoken in three years, the words that he had asked to be taught first. As she walked in, she was greeted by a big smile on the young man's face. Carefully forming his words, he said to her:

"Please, Miss Freeman.....shut up!"

The young man, of course, was just having some fun with his nurse, but I would gather that after all that time he was really excited to be the one doing the talking. It must be frustrating not to be able to talk...communicate.

DEVELOPMENT

One of the real inconveniences of aging is the gradual loss of hearing that many people experience. For some, it's quite discouraging and for others, it's down right humiliating, though it need not be. It's simply part of life, a part of getting older.

You may have heard about the man who bragged that he had just purchased the finest hearing aid available. A friend asked,

"What kind is it?" And the man replied, looking down at his wrist, "Oh, about 2:30".

As I watched Miss Alabama become our new Miss America Saturday night a week ago, I was reminded that it was Helen Keller, who when asked whether she would rather have her sight or her hearing, replied her hearing. The loss of hearing is an isolating experience. It cuts us off from others. It puts us at a great disadvantage in any relationship.

HE HAD SOME FRIENDS

Such was the plight of the man we heard about in today's scripture lesson who was brought to Jesus. He not only had lost his hearing, but his ability to speak as well. He was cut off from the world, cut off from his family, from his friends, cut off from those around him. He was one of the nameless and forgotten people of that area that Jesus was now passing through, called the Decapolis.

However, this man was fortunate because he had some friends and those friends took the time and the effort to bring him to Jesus. This is the first thing I want us to reflect upon this morning. He had some friends who stood by.

David Levenson has written a book entitled, The Seasons of a Man's Life. In an examination of the factors that contribute to the development, to the growth and success of people, he researched a number of successful people and discovered

three primary factors which seem to be essential to success. Let me give them to you. First, there is a great vision, a "driving dream that moves and motivates you to do something with your life". Those who give themselves to the fulfillment of something worthwhile always experience a great sense of accomplishment.

He goes on. The second thing common to each of these "highly successful" people was that they had each found a teacher who could instruct and help them along the way. In other words, not only do we need a vision, but we need some folks who have had visions before us and who can walk beside us, and point the way. How blessed we are, those of us who have had such teachers!

But there was another "commonality" among these successful people. Third, they all had a deeply personal and significant relationship with at least one other person, someone who would support them in their dream. These were the folks who would walk with them through the difficult times, even when it seemed as though the dream would never come true. In short, they had a friend.

This man in the scriptures who could not hear and could not speak had something more valuable than either of those physical attributes. He had friends.

In Egypt, fragments of early writings were uncovered from the sand. These fragments contain sayings believed to be those of Christ not recorded in the New Testament. One of these fragments contained this sentence. "And Jesus said, 'Make a friend'". This man that we're thinking about this morning in Mark's Gospel had friends. And blessed are those who have friends.

THEY SAW TO IT THAT HE GOT THE HELP HE NEEDED

he got the help he needed.

More importantly, his friends were determined to see that

It's true, isn't it....that some people we call friends are simply social acquaintances. We smile and say hello. They may even invite us to a party or a shower, but they do not care about us enough to intervene when they see or sense we're in trouble. ...in difficulty. Good friends, I think, do. It can be risky.

A few years ago, "The Betty Ford Story" was aired on television. As I recall, this made for TV movie was produced with the help and support of Mrs. Ford, herself. The movie dealt with Mrs. Ford's addiction to prescription drugs and also to alcohol. Apparently she had been overwhelmed by both the demands and the stresses of being First Lady. She also had debilitating pain from arthritis which led to pain pills and eventually to alcohol.

Fortunately her family loved her enough to comfort her with her problems. In the most powerful scene of the movie, one by one her family shares their love and concern for her. They try to tell her that she has become addicted to prescription medicine and that she has become an alcoholic. At first, Betty Ford denies that she has any such problem, but her family is persistent with their love. Eventually she realizes that she does have a problem and seeks help. In the movie, in that moving scene, her youngest child, Susan, says to her mother,

"Mother, always before when you had a problem you turned to God and to your family, but lately you have shut us out. You have turned to medicine and to drinking and you are killing yourself". That took courage on Susan's part. She played the part not only of daughter, but also of friend.

When you see a friend in trouble, you seek to intervene. You seek to make certain he or she gets the help they need. But back to our text. So it was with this man. His friends brought him to Jesus. They begged Jesus to lay His hands on him. They believed that Jesus could help their friend and how wonderful it is to have friends like that. He was indeed blessed. And this to: how wonderful to be a friend like that.

JESUS PROVED TO BE THIS MAN'S BEST FRIEND

Another lesson here to think about. Jesus, I'm sure, proved to be this man's best friend for Jesus set him free. He set him free. He made a difference in his life. Our faith in Christ even today can set us free!

I'm sure that Jesus must have been filled with love and with compassion for the man; He saw that he had suffered much. He took him aside, away from the crowd, talked to him in private. He then put His fingers in the man's ears and then spat and touched the man's tongue. We read that He then looked up to heaven and commanded, "Be Open" and immediately the man could hear, and immediately he could speak without any impediment. He was free. A miracle of healing.

This man could now lead a productive life. No longer was he an outcast, unable to hear what was said...isolated...no longer unable to communicate with others. Thanks to Jesus, he was a whole person once again. The people, said Mark, were "astounded beyond measure". That man that day discovered that he not only had friends who had brought him to Jesus, but even more than that, he discovered that he had a friend in Jesus. Such a friend!

Now the method that Jesus used here in healing is interesting to me. Go back for a moment. First, He put His fingers in the ears of this man. Then He spat and touched the man's tongue. Rather dramatic...more so than other healing accounts. Normally, He just spoke and healing took place, but this time it was a bit different. Always remember, you're not a realist if you don't believe in miracles. We believe, but sometimes our unbelief gets in the way.

I came across a story recently that touches on a healing incident that was somewhat unusual. Lindsay Reynolds was diagnosed at one time in her life as having a borderline personality disorder - psychoses. She was spending time in a hospital where they were trying to help her. While there, there happened to be a young English boy who was also a patient in the hospital. He had a private room and this caused a bit of jealousy among the other 35 patients. They had their meals in a small room...dining room...all 35 of them jammed in and there were constant scenes.

One time, for instance, a large lady had a seizure. She threw the entire table over. Food was flying into the faces of the people present. This very sardonic guy sitting next to Lindsay said, without flinching or cracking a smile, "The food is bad...but it's not that bad".

Anyway, this young English boy did not have to sit in the dining room. He was catatonic and rarely gave any signs of awareness. He annoyed Lindsay as he stood on the edge of his room and looked, as she said, "so superior"...this young boy who was probably quite miserable. So one day Lindsay took off at top speed from one end of the hall and tackled him as he stood outside his room. The young man went flying into the air, but he came down on top of Lindsay and startled flailing away with his fists.

He was really hitting her hard. He was screaming. He hadn't talked in a year and now he was screaming all this foul language. It was a spectacular scene. And the nurses just wanted to kill Lindsay for causing what had taken place. But later on the young man was discharged. Sometime later, Lindsay was walking the ward when the young man's "resident" came up to her and said,

"Promise me that you will never tell anybody what I'm about to tell you?"

She promised. He went on to say that Lindsay's tackling of that young man was probably the best thing that had ever happened to him. Said the resident,

"I don't think that anything could have helped him more. He's moving about....talking all the time now...."

It was a tremendous cathartic release for the young English boy just what he needed. Lindsay, of course, had no altruistic motives whatsoever. She was being hostile, but this boy got better.

Back to our scripture passage. The methods that Jesus used in treating this man who could neither hear nor speak were different from His standard operating procedure, but it worked! Evidently they were just what this man needed. And this leads me to offer an important insight.

Jesus treats us not as we might choose to be treated. But rather He treats us in ways that meet our needs. Sometimes we get discouraged because we pray and nothing seems to be happening. Or, things may actually appear to be getting worse. But hang in there. I believe that Jesus is the best friend that you and I will ever have. He knows our needs and whatever He does for us will be exactly what we need. We may not see His hand at work. We may not understand His methods, but He is there. He cares for us. He will help. He will heal.

OUR MISSION IS TO BEFRIEND OTHERS

This man had some friends and they saw to it that the man got help, the help he needed. They brought him to Jesus who turned out to be the best friend of all. And one final thought.

If Christ has befriended us, so then we ought to befriend some other. This is what the church is all about....it's about being a friend, reaching out to others and lending a helping hand.

A friend shared a story with me recently. This summer a young boy was brought into a class of Vacation Bible School. This eight year old boy was missing an arm..like Jim Abbott of the Yankees. Since the class was almost over, the teacher had no opportunity to learn of the background of his handicap or his state of adjustment. She was a bit nervous and afraid that one of the other children would comment on his handicap and embarrass him. She proceeded as carefully as possible even though she didn't have opportunity to caution the other children.

On closing day she asked the children to join her in a closing exercise that went this way. "Let's make our church. Here's the church and there's the steeple....Open the door and" Suddenly it struck her. She had done the very thing she was afraid the other children would do.

As she stood there speechless, the little girl sitting next to the boy reached over and placed her left hand in his right hand and said,

"Davey....let's make this church together....."

I loved it. But that's the nature of the church. Helping friends. Not tearing them down, but lifting them up...following in the footsteps of Jesus because He is still the best friend of all.

PRAYER

And now send us forth from here with joy and gladness, with love and peace in our hearts. You have come to us in Jesus, O God, and we believe that You can help us no matter what our condition may be. Strengthen us in our faith. Take us out of ourselves so that we may be a friend to others. In the spirit of the best friend we shall ever have, we ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

"SUCH A FRIEND"

A Sermon By

Philip A. C. Clarke

Park Avenue United Methodist Church
106 East 86th Street
New York, New York 10028
September 25, 1994

"SUCH A FRIEND"

INTRODUCTION

A student nurse was assigned to the care of a young man who had been stricken with a paralyzing disease. He had lost his ability to speak, although his understanding and his intelligence were OK. The student nurse was determined to keep him cheerful. Day in and day out she would talk to him...sharing the latest scores, the latest movies, talk about the weather and the classmate who fell in love and eloped...and on and on and on.

Months later the student nurse received an invitation to his doctor's office....a summons to "see what progress her ex-patient had made". His speech therapist explained that she had been invited to hear the first words her patient had spoken in three years, the words that he had asked to be taught first. As she walked in, she was greeted by a big smile on the young man's face. Carefully forming his words, he said to her:

"Please, Miss Freeman.....shut up!"

The young man, of course, was just having some fun with his nurse, but I would gather that after all that time he was really excited to be the one doing the talking. It must be frustrating not to be able to talk...communicate.

DEVELOPMENT

One of the real inconveniences of aging is the gradual loss of hearing that many people experience. For some, it's quite discouraging and for others, it's down right humiliating, though it need not be. It's simply part of life, a part of getting older.

You may have heard about the man who bragged that he had just purchased the finest hearing aid available. A friend asked,

"What kind is it?" And the man replied, looking down at his wrist, "Oh, about 2:30".

As I watched Miss Alabama become our new Miss America Saturday night a week ago, I was reminded that it was Helen Keller, who when asked whether she would rather have her sight or her hearing, replied her hearing. The loss of hearing is an isolating experience. It cuts us off from others. It puts us at a great disadvantage in any relationship.

HE HAD SOME FRIENDS

Such was the plight of the man we heard about in today's scripture lesson who was brought to Jesus. He not only had lost his hearing, but his ability to speak as well. He was cut off from the world, cut off from his family, from his friends, cut off from those around him. He was one of the nameless and forgotten people of that area that Jesus was passing through, called the Decapolis.

However, this man was fortunate because he had some friends and those friends took the time and the effort to bring him to Jesus. This is the first thing I want us to reflect upon this morning. He had some friends who stood by.

David Levenson has written a book entitled, The Seasons of a Man's Life. In an examination of the factors that contribute to the development, to the growth and success of people, he researched a number of successful people and discovered

three primary factors which seem to be essential to success. Let me give them to you. First, there is a great vision, a "driving dream that moves and motivates you to do something with your life". Those who give themselves to the fulfillment of something worthwhile always experience a great sense of accomplishment.

He goes on. The second thing common to each of these "highly successful" people was that they had each found a teacher who could instruct and help them along the way. In other words, not only do we need a vision, but we need some folks who have had visions before us and who can walk beside us, and point the way.

But there was another "commonality" among these successful people. Third, they all had a deeply person and a significant relationship with at least one other person, someone who would support them in their dream. These were the folks who would walk with them through the difficult times, even when it seemed as though the dream would never come true. In short, they had a friend.

This man in the scriptures who could not hear and could not speak had something more valuable than either of those physical attributes. He had friends.

In Egypt, fragments of early writings were uncovered from the sand. These fragments contain sayings believed to be those of Christ not recorded in the New Testament. One of these fragments contained this sentence. "And Jesus said, 'Make a friend'". This man that we're thinking about this morning in Mark's Gospel had friends.

THEY SAW TO IT THAT HE GOT THE HELP HE NEEDED

More importantly, his friends were determined to see that

he got the help he needed.

It's true, isn't it....that some people we call friends are simply social acquaintances. We smile and say hello. They may even invite us to a party or a shower, but they do not care about us enough to intervene when they see or sense we're in trouble.

A few years ago, "The Betty Ford Story" was aired on television. As I recall, this made for TV movie was produced with the help and support of Mrs. Ford, herself. The movie dealt with Mrs. Ford's addiction to prescription drugs and also to alcohol. Apparently she had been overwhelmed by both the demands and the stresses of being First Lady. She also had debilitating pain from arthritis which led to pain pills and eventually to alcohol.

Fortunately her family loved her enough to comfort her with her problems. In the most powerful scene of the movie, one by one her family shares their love and concern for her. They try to tell her that she has become addicted to prescription medicine and that she has become an alcoholic. At first, Betty Ford denies that she has any such problem, but her family is persistent with their love. Eventually she realizes that she does have a problem and seeks help. In the movie, in that moving scene, her youngest child, Susan, says to her mother,

"Mother, always before when you had a problem you turned to God and to your family, but lately you have shut us out. You have turned to medicine and to drinking and you are killing yourself". That took courage on Susan's part. She played the part not only of daughter, but also of friend.

When you see a friend in trouble, you seek to intervene. You seek to make certain he or she gets the help they need. But back to our text. So it was with this man. His friends brought him to Jesus. They begged Jesus to lay His hands on him. They believed that Jesus could help their friend and how wonderful it is to have friends like that. He was indeed blessed. And this to: how wonderful to be a friend like that.

JESUS PROVED TO BE THIS MAN'S BEST FRIEND

Another lesson here to think about. Jesus, I'm sure, proved to be this man's best friend for Jesus set him free. He set him free. He made a difference in his life.

I'm sure that Jesus must have been filled with love and with compassion for the man; He saw that he had suffered much. He took him aside, away from the crowd, talked to him in private. He then put His fingers in the man's ears and then spat and touched the man's tongue. We read that He then looked up to heaven and commanded, "Be Open" and immediately the man could hear, and immediately he could speak without any impediment. He was free. A miracle of healing.

This man could now lead a productive life. No longer was he an outcast, unable to hear what was said...isolated...no longer unable to communicate with others. Thanks to Jesus, he was a whole person once again. The people, said Mark, were "astounded beyond measure". That man that day discovered that he not only had friends who had brought him to Jesus, but even more than that, he discovered that he had a friend in Jesus. Such a friend!

Now the method that Jesus used here in healing is interesting to me. Go back for a moment. First, He put His fingers in the ears of this man. Then He spat and touched the man's tongue. Rather dramatic...more so than other healing accounts. Normally, He just spoke and healing took place, but time time it was a bit different. Always remember, you're not a realist if you don't believe in miracles. We believe, but sometimes our unbelief gets in the way.

I came across a story recently that touches on a healing incident that was somewhat unusual. Lindsay Reynolds was diagnosed at one time in her life as having a borderline personality disorder - psychoses. She was spending time in a hospital where they were trying to help her. While there, there happened to be a young English boy who was also a patient in the hospital. He had a private room and this caused a bit of jealousy among the other 35 patients. They had their meals in a small room...dining room...all 35 of them jammed in and there were constant scenes.

One time, for instance, a large lady had a seizure. She threw the entire table over. Food was flying into the faces of the people present. This very sardonic guy sitting next to Lindsay said, without flinching or cracking a smile, "The food is bad...but it's not that bad".

Anyway, this young English boy did not have to sit in the dining room. He was catatonic and rarely gave any signs of awareness. He annoyed Lindsay as he stood on the edge of his room and looked, as she said, "so superior"...this young boy who was probably quite miserable. So one day Lindsay took off at top speed from one end of the hall and tackled him as he stood outside his room. The young man went flying into the air, but he came down on top of Lindsay and startled flailing away with his fists.

He was really hitting her hard. He was screaming. He hadn't talked in a year and now he was screaming all this foul language. It was a spectacular scene. And the nurses just wanted to kill Lindsay for causing what had taken place. But later on the young man was discharged. Sometime later, Lindsay was walking the ward when the young man's "redisent" came up to her and said,

"Promise me that you will never tell anybody what I'm about to tell you?"

She promised. He went on to say that Lindsay's tackling of that young man was probably the best thing that had ever happened to him. Said the resident,

"I don't think that anything could have helped him more. He's moving about....talking all the time now...."

It was a tremendous cathartic release for the young English boy, just what he needed. Lindsay, of course, had no altruistic motives whatever. She was being hostile, but this boy got better.

Back to our scripture passage. The method that Jesus used in treating this man who could neither hear nor speak were different from His standard operating procedure, but they worked! Evidently they were just what this man needed. And this leads me to offer an important insight.

Jesus treats us not as we might choose to be treated. But rather He treats us in ways that meet our needs. Sometimes we get discouraged because we pray and nothing seems to be happening. Or, things may actually appear to be getting worse. But hang in there. I believe that Jesus is the best friend that you and I will ever have. He knows our needs and whatever He does for us will be exactly what we need. We may not see His hand at work. We may not understand His methods, but He is there. He cares for us. He will help. He will heal.

OUR MISSION IS TO BEFRIEND OTHERS

This man had some friends and they saw to it that the man got help, the help he needed. They brought him to Jesus who turned out to be the best friend of all. And one final thought.

If Christ has befriended us, so then we ought to befriend some other. This is what the church is all about....it's about being a friend, reaching out to others and lending a helping hand.

A friend shared a story with me recently. This summer a young boy was brought into a class of Vacation Bible School. This eight year old boy was missing an arm...like Jim Abbot of the Yankees. Since the class was almost over, the teacher had no opportunity to learn of the background of his handicap or his state of adjustment. She was a bit nervous and afraid that one of the other children would comment on his handicap and embarrass him. She proceeded as carefully as possible even though she didn't have opportunity to caution the other children.

On closing day she asked the children to join her in a closing exercise that went this way. "Let's make our church. Here's the church and there's the steeple....Open the door and" Suddenly it struck her. She had done the very thing she was afraid the other children would do.

As she stood there speechless, the little girl sitting next to the boy reached over and placed her left hand in his right hand and said,

"Davey....let's make this church together....."

✓ I loved it. But that's the nature of the church. Helping friends. Not tearing them down, but lifting them up. Following in the footsteps of Jesus because He is still the best friend of all.

✓ PRAYER And now send us forth from here with joy and gladness, with love and peace in our hearts. You have come to us in Jesus, O God, and we believe that You can help us no matter what our condition may be. Strengthen us in our faith. Take us out of ourselves so that we may be a friend to others. In the spirit of the best friend we shall ever have, we ask this in the name of Jesus. Amen.