

Sermon on 20 October 2013 at Hannover International Worship

Pastor Tesso Benti

John 15, 9-17

The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God and the Fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all. Amen!

In our sermon text we read about love and friendship. The question I want ask today is:

Who is a friend? Or how do we define friendship? Before answering this question let me start my sermon with a story I heard here in Germany.

There was a boy whose birth was foretold by an old prophet who said: "the boy will only get old if he does not get to know himself". The prophecy was meaningless until the boy grew and became 16 years old, the age between youth and adulthood. Until then all men and women fell in love with him, but he did not respond to their love because he did not know how to love others.

One day he heard an Echo and fell in love with her. The Echo was always at his side, she followed him at every turn. But because of the punishment of the gods the Echo could not speak with him, but kept repeating the last words she had just heard. The boy was eager to enjoy love with her but the echo only repeated his last word and then disappeared. Being frustrated with the situation, one day he disappeared from his Echo. On the way he came to a small lake, which was so quiet, pure and looked like a mirror.

He bowed down to drink water and all of a sudden he saw the most beautiful creature he had ever seen. He then bowed down again and looked into the water. Then he discovered that it was his own picture, and he recognised himself and fell in love with himself. His love was so great that he had a heart attack and died. The prophecy of an old prophet was fulfilled; the boy was buried and from his grave sprouted a flower that was named after his name and called Narcissus.

Let's come back to our question: who is a friend?

Generally speaking people say: a friend is someone who likes you. Unfortunately, liking someone alone cannot define a true friendship, because we witness that many people pretend to like the others but in reality they like only themselves.

The boy in the story first loved his Echo then his love grew to love only himself. Most of the time people prefer to hear only their own echo and do not have the ear that hears the echo of others.

People like to be friends of rich people, of those who have big positions or who are popular stars. Last month I heard on radio, that the American singer Lady Gaga has 59 million friends on her face book.

The President of the United States of America, Barack Obama, has also many friends on his face book.

People become friends of popular people either to gain personal advantage or prestige.

Kings and princes have friends as long as they are in position. In the Ethiopian language there is a saying: If the child of a King dies, the funeral guests are plenty but if a King himself dies his friends are twenty. This saying became true in Ethiopia. In the 1960s the son of Emperor Haile Sellassie of Ethiopia died and all the Ethiopians mourned. Ten years later in 1974 the Emperor himself was killed and even his relatives betrayed him.

True friends are those who are at your side when you are in a critical position and in need of help. A true friend loves the other to the extent of paying all necessary sacrifices for the friendship. In our sermon text we read that Jesus said to His disciple:

" Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you"(Joh. 15, 12-13): The first language of the New Testament, Greek, has three words for "love"

1. EROS: A type of love based on human sexuality, it looks for physical beauty, charm, splendour and the like.
2. PHILIA, the friendship that is based on similar political or religious convictions, talent and sympathy. The love between children and parents, between relatives comes under this category.
3. AGAPE: It is a divine love. God so loved the world and gave His only Son (John. 3:16). Out of divine love Jesus gave his life on the cross. Such love is the greatest of all.

We all have different stories about how we became Christians, but one thing we have in common. We are loved, sanctified and called by Jesus to be his friends. We are not by chance in the world. The love of God is the cause, the foundation and the goal of our life.

Jesus who loved us commands us to love others without any precondition. The whole commandment and rules of the Bible are summarized under one word 'LOVE'.

True love establishes true friendship with God and with fellow humans. True love forces us to give our lives for another. Giving one's life for someone does not necessarily mean to die a physical death. Paul says as a Christian I die every day (1Cor 15; 31). If we want to live the life of a Christian we need to die daily for something. This could mean dying for personal luxury and to help those who need me.

We can give concrete examples in our city of Hannover.

There are people who die for personal luxury, because of love. There are married people who do not leave their alcoholic partner, although many see this as an imposition, to be married to such a man. However such married people say: If I leave my spouse , then he is completely lost.

There are parents who support their children, whatever they do and continue to love them.

I know individuals who give up personal luxury in order to take care of their elderly parents in their homes or in senior homes. I know individuals who visit their elderly parents once or twice every day in senior homes. Such people do not have free time

of movement because their helpless mother or father is waiting for them. There are school teachers who never give up helping the troublesome school children.

There are social workers who work with addicted people, who have psychological and social problems. The social workers have stress and see little success, however they do not give up their jobs.

There are volunteers who give their time and money for others out of love. On 31 of August 2013 Radio Leinehertz, a local radio station of the city of Hannover, awarded individuals and groups who voluntarily helped the needy people of this city. To mention one out of many, a 75 year-old lady doctor together with her husband established a mobile dental clinic for the homeless people in the city of Hannover. They go with their equipment to the streets and treat the teeth of street inhabitants. They help very down trodden people who may not even say thank you to them.

This is the type of love that Jesus commands all Christians. True love creates true friendship, and out of friendship grow peaceful relationships that our world need. Christianity is not only a religion but it is also a peaceful relationship. May God help us to be the founders of peaceful relationships.

May the peace of God which transcends all understandings keep our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.