

Do You Love Your Friends?

Romans 10:1

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

One of the funny things that came to us when we came to America was that everybody at college was asking the deep philosophical question, "Who am I?" And it was hard for us to understand because we thought, well, you just checked out your billfold or your driver's license, and there is no problem.

But I think I can see it a little more now that it is true, isn't it, that in such a pluralistic society as ours there are many of us who just wonder, what am I really? What kind of person really am I? And we know that we appear to certain people in one way at sports and we have another kind of image at work. We are known in a different way at church and we know we have certain opinions that we express in regard to politics. And we have other opinions that we express in regard to philosophy and other opinions that we express in regard to religion. Yet, many of us, I think, with all this difference sides and facets to our personalities and all these different levels on which we exist, many of us do wonder at times, but wait a minute, let me just stop, what do I really care about in this life? What really am I? Who really am I? What kind of person am I really deep down? Probably all of us who would agree, yeah, it is important as those old philosopher said to know thyself. And I think many of us as we have tried to zero in on the real answer, we just get distracted. We think, well, we'll put it off to another day and somehow we never have settled that question.

I'd like to suggest to you a way that you might approach it today. Think of this question: what do you want most for the person that you live with? What do you want most for the person you live with? So, for some of us that's our roommate and for some of us it is a dear friend and for others it's a husband or a wife, for some of us it's parents, some of us children. Now think of them, what do you want most for them?

"Well, I certainly think that they should be a little more considerate of my feelings. I'd like that. I'd like them to be a little more considerate of my feelings. I would, if you ask me. And the toothpaste -- I wish they would squeeze it from the bottom up. And I wish they would come home in time for supper and not half an hour later. And I suppose what I want most for them all, I would love them to just think a little more of what I need and the kind of person I am. If they would just think a little more of somebody else than themselves."

This is really interesting, isn't it? Because we talk so much in our society about being a caring person and about breaking down communication barriers and about relating to others and about loving others. Yet, isn't it wild that we are given a question, what do you want most for the person you live with, and we don't hear that question at all, we don't. Because all those things that we've said are not for their good they're for our good. We want them to squeeze the toothpaste from the bottom up for our good. We want them to come home for supper in time for our good. It's interesting that the question is, what do you want most for the person you live with? But we interpret it to mean, what do I want most the person that I live with to do for me, that they are not doing at the moment?

It is amazing, isn't it, that we are so wrapped up in our selves and are so used to looking at life so much from our own personal view point and with self reference always in mind that we tend to answer that way or not. I don't know if you answer that way or not, maybe you didn't. But it

probably would embarrass us, how many of us thought, what do I want most for the person I live with? Well, yeah, those things. And you know others of us might say, "Oh! Yeah, well that's obviously selfish, I know that's wrong. What do I want most for the person I live with? Well, boy I would just like her to meet a nice guy and oh, I'd love her just to be happier. I'd love her just to be happier. Meet a nice guy, have a family, just find fulfillment, that's what I'd like." Or we say, "Well, I wish she could get a good job. I wish she could. I wish she could stop just jumping from one job to another and get a good job with challenges and with good prospects."

Or some of us who have parents, we say, "Oh, I just wish Mom and Dad would be happy" or "I just wish their finances would work out right." Or, some of us with children, "Well, I just wish they'd get a good education so that they wouldn't need to fear for the future and I wish they'd get a good job and marry the right person." And at least all those wishes are unselfish, aren't they? They may have selfish tinges to them, but they are more or less unselfish wishes. So, in that way, they are good. But in another way they are all pretty temporary, aren't they? I mean the happiness really we know won't last forever and it probably won't last very long. Then the family doesn't last forever, actually, and we all know our jobs don't last forever. Certainly the money doesn't last forever. So, in a way, we can see, yeah, that's what we want most for our friends, but yeah, this is true they are kind of temporary things. Of course, that's exactly what the person who convinced us all that He knew why we were here, that's exactly what He said about all those things. Maybe you'd look at it.

Matthew 6:19, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal", and then, over the page to verse 25, "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you shall eat or what you shall drink; nor about your body, what you shall put on." Oh, well, if I'd known you wanted a religious answer, I mean, then I'd have given it to you. And isn't that interesting, too. That tells us something about ourselves, doesn't it? Because we have all kinds of answers. In a way, that's part of why we feel so fragmented and so disintegrated as personalities. I mean, we have all kinds of faces, all kinds of masks, all kinds of opinions that we can put on for all kinds of different people in all kinds of different situations, isn't that right? And so we can want this for them financially and it depends whether you are talking about them financially, or whether you're talking about them matrimonially, or whether you're talking about them professionally or psychologically, or if you are talking about them religiously. Oh, well, we can give you that as well. That tends to be our response, doesn't it?

And really, don't you think that it's very close to, well, we want for them whatever they want for themselves? That's it. I mean I know she is gunning for that guy and has been for weeks and well, I just wish she'd catch him. And I know he has been worried about a job for months and well, I wish he'd get a job. And so, many of us answer the question what do we want most for the person we live with in terms of what they would want for themselves. And yet that isn't love, sure it isn't. It actually isn't love because a six-year old wants to sit all day eating ice-cream and cookies and drinking Coke and then he wants to be free to run across any freeway he cares at any time. And yet a mom's love just doesn't let him do whatever he wants. She doesn't want for him what he wants because she knows that would kill him. So, her love guides all the way she treats him and all her wishes for him so that she will be able to protect him and enable him to grow up a strong body that will last. And you notice that about love, don't you? That, love wants the best that it knows for people. So, our answer to the question, what do you want most for the person you live with is revealing. Because if you want just whatever they want, then, I wonder do you love them? Or, are you taking the easy way out? It's none of my business, it's a free country, let them have what they want. I'll help them to get it.

So do you really love them? Because your wishes don't have much purpose and certainly don't express what you think is most important in life. Or, if you do really want those things for them -- if you do really think the greatest thing for them would be to get the right wife, greatest thing for them would be to get the right job, greatest thing for them would be to get the right position or the right opportunity or the right prospects -- then how seriously do you take the things that this Jesus has said to us about life? I mean, it is true, isn't it? If what he said is true, if what is born of the flesh is flesh and all we have here is something that's not going to last very long, and therefore, it isn't worth spending time clothing it elaborately and taking tremendous care over making it look good above everything else -- if it's all going to go and disappear and if all this world is going to eventually be burned up and destroyed and if all of us who are preoccupied with a safety of this flesh and the importance of this flesh and the happiness of this flesh, we are only all going to be burned in our own lust and a kind of lake of fire where we'll live with each other in terror and in agony and in avarice -- then boy, surely the thing we should want most for the person we live with is that they be safe from all that.

I mean surely that's what we should want most. And that's, you remember, what was the purpose of God's love and that verse that the choir sang, "Why did God so love the world so that whoever believed on his son would not perish, but have eternal life." So, if you really love that person you live with, will you not want the best that you know for them? And that's what the verse that we are studying today says. It's the first verse of Romans 10. It's what Paul wanted for his dear friends in the Jewish religion. It's Romans 10, loved ones, and verse one, Romans 10:1. "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved." Well, get back to you and me. What is the deepest desire of your heart for the person you live with? What is the thing that your inner being wants most for them? I think a lot of us, you know, in a very sanctimonious way can say, "Oh, yeah, I wish they believed the way I believe" and we think, well then we wouldn't have so much trouble living with them. And I wish that they would see things as they really are and not be so dumb. We have that kind of attitude: what we need is to get them saved. And, of course, that's totally different, you know, from the way Paul expressed it. Because the truth is that that dear one that you live with, whether it's your wife or your husband or your dear friend, that dear one is a half ghost of the person that God meant them to be.

They are poor half ghosts of the person that God meant them to be. They are pawns, they are the pawns of events and circumstances and people and all kinds of forces that they, dear souls, can't control. They're poor half ghosts of what they are meant to be. And the truth is that God has long ago put them into his son and completely remade them and transformed them. If they would only believe that and live that, they would be utterly changed in their own lives. They would not only would live forever, but would live the kind of lives that God wants them to live. And that's what we mean when we say "my desire for them is that they would be saved."

We don't mean that they go to church or they dot all the 'i's and cross all the 't's of all the creeds that we believe in. We mean that they would be the kinds of free, confident, loving people that God originally made them, and that he has recreated them in his son Jesus. If only they would realize that, that they have already being recreated and would live now in the light of that. Then they would find a new power that would enable them to be that.

In other words, wanting any person to be saved is nothing but the most benevolent, most kindly, gentle, continuous wish that you could have for any person. I suppose I'd ask you, what do you want most for your friend that you live with? And, I think, we'd all feel the same if there was some

poisonous gas being spread throughout America and we had masks that would protect us from it and we wouldn't give one and didn't even want to give one to our friend that we live with. Don't we owe it to them to give them the very best that we know? If you don't think that's the very best that you know then, why do you even come here on Sundays? Where does it stand in your life? What is most important in your life?

I just share with you, that it really doesn't entail preaching, you know. It doesn't entail preaching at the poor souls. They've had plenty of that and there is plenty of that in America. But it entails what Paul said, "My heart's desire for you" -- my heart's desire, the real desire of my heart. Every time you look at them are you thinking, I wish I could persuade them to come with me? Or, are you thinking, I wish I could get what they want? Or are you thinking, I wish that they could see what God has made them in Jesus? Then if you really want that, it will show itself in what he spoke about, "my heart's desire and prayer to God." That's how they come to it. How do they come to know that they've already been put into Jesus and his death has become theirs and they've been transformed by his resurrection? They know by the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit. How does enlightenment of the Holy Spirit come? Well, it's plain there, if you look at Ephesians, loved ones. This is the last verse I'd ask you to look at. Ephesians, Chapter 1, verse 16. There is just one way it always comes. "I do not cease to give thanks for you, remembering you in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him." The only way they'll get that revelation of God, in verse 18, you see, "having the eyes of their hearts enlightened that they may know what is the hope to which He has called you." The only way is through your prayers. And I'd just ask you that. Do you ever pray? And then I'd ask, do you pray every day for the person you are living with? And it does need prayer you know, and prayer may be of a different kind to what we often talk about.

John Welsh, a Scottish preacher, thought the day ill spent if he did not spend 8 or 10 hours in prayer. He kept a lap blanket that he might wrap himself when he arose to pray at night. His wife would complain when she found him lying on the ground weeping. He would reply, "My dear, I've the souls of 3000 to answer for and I know not how it is with many of them." And when you think of all the things we do for each other, the presents we buy and the little troubles we go to in order to make each other happy, really, isn't it time we began to see the thing the right way around? And we began to spend some time praying that the person we live with would be saved? What kind of person are you? What do you really want most for the person you live with? Your answer to that question will tell you and me a lot about ourselves. I'd just ask you to be real. Don't pretend but be real. Let's start from where we are.

Dear Father, we want to thank you for the dear person we live with, whether it's our wife or our husband or our dear friend with whom we share the apartment or the room. Father, thank you for them. And we apologize, Lord, if we have been giving them just what they wanted or if we have been giving them the least valuable of what we ourselves have--our food and our friendship, sharing our clothes, at times. Lord, we see that we are living a lie if our dearest heart's desire and prayer to God for them is not that they be saved. Lord, we would examine ourselves this day and we would change our ways as we see best by your light, for your glory. Amen.