

**“Our Theological Vision:  
Aspirational Values: Relationships and Community  
Various Texts  
April 24, 2022  
Faith Presbyterian Church – Morning Service  
*Pastor Nicoletti***

**The Reading of the Word**

Before Palm Sunday and Easter, we were going through a sermon series on our theological vision as a church.

We have three more Sundays in that series, and then, after that, we will return to our regular series, going through books of the Bible.

So far, we have considered our core purpose and four core values – values that are particular characteristics of us as a church, in addition to the central tenets of Christianity, and our Reformed doctrinal standards.

In terms of our core purpose, we said that Faith Presbyterian Church exists to be God’s instrument in making, maintaining, and maturing disciples for Jesus Christ.

And then we identified four of our core values as:

- the deep exposition of Holy Scripture,
- thoughtful and robust liturgical worship,
- a culture of Reformed catholicity, and
- the nurture and equipping of Covenant children.

Over the next three Sundays, we will consider three aspirational values of our congregation. These are things that we value, that are already at work in some ways in our congregation, but which are also areas we know we need to grow in.

We are considering them together to acknowledge their importance, to encourage you to pursue them as a congregation in your Christian life and in the life of our church, and to explain some of the plans we have as the leadership of the church in the season ahead.

We will consider three categories of aspirational values over the next three Sundays, and our first, today, is: Relationships and Community.

This morning we will focus on the kind of relationships we hope to see continue to grow between our members, and then tonight I will speak about the nature of the community we seek to continue to cultivate.

With that theme in mind, we will hear now from several texts. Please do listen carefully, for this is God’s word for us this morning.

First from Genesis chapter two, we will start a little bit further down, in verse eight. Here we have the story of creation before sin entered the world. We read:

<sup>8</sup> And the LORD [Yahweh] God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. <sup>9</sup> And out of the ground Yahweh God made to spring up every tree that is

pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

[Then skipping down to verse fifteen ...]

<sup>15</sup>Yahweh God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. <sup>16</sup>And Yahweh God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, <sup>17</sup>but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

<sup>18</sup>Then Yahweh God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.”

Then several verses from the Book of Proverbs:

A man of many companions may come to ruin,  
but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

[Proverbs 18:24]

A friend loves at all times,  
and a brother is born for adversity.

[Proverbs 17:17]

Oil and perfume make the heart glad,  
and the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel.

[Proverbs 27:9]

Faithful are the wounds of a friend;  
profuse are the kisses of an enemy.

[Proverbs 27:6]

Iron sharpens iron,  
and one man sharpens another.

[Proverbs 27:17]

From Ecclesiastes 4:

<sup>9</sup>Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. <sup>10</sup>For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up! <sup>11</sup>Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? <sup>12</sup>And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken.

From 1 Thessalonians 5:

<sup>9</sup>For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>10</sup>who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him. <sup>11</sup>Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.

And finally, from Romans 12:10:

Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

This is the word of the Lord. (Thanks be to God.)

“All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.” [1 Peter 1:24-25]

Let's pray ...

### **Prayer of Illumination**

Lord, you have dealt well with us,  
just as you have promised in your word.  
Teach us now good judgment and knowledge,  
for we believe in your word to us – your commandments and your testimonies.  
You are good and you do good,  
teach us your ways.  
We know that your word to us in the Scriptures is of more value for us  
than thousands of pieces of gold and silver.  
Help us now to treat it and attend to it as such.  
Grant this, we ask, for Jesus's sake. Amen.  
[Based on Psalm 119:65, 66, 68, 72]

### **Introduction**

While our focus this evening will be a more zoomed-out view of Christian community, our focus this morning is a more zoomed-in look at our relationships themselves.

And the specific category of relationships we are going to focus on is friendship. This morning we're talking about friendship.

And as we do, we will consider five things – we'll consider: the need, the lack, the categories, the path, and the goal.

So: the need, the lack, the categories, the path, and the goal.

### **The Need for Friendship**

So first, the need for friendship.

This is highlighted in the Book of Proverbs. In fact, friendship is such a significant theme in the Book of Proverbs, that Old Testament commentator Derek Kidner devoted an entire subject-study to it in his commentary on the book.

The Book of Proverbs is wisdom literature. And wisdom in the Bible is about the art and the skill of godly living. And Proverbs tells us that if we want to live wisely as Christians, we need friends. And as we read the proverbs about friendship, we realize that more is in view here than just the kindness that we owe to all our neighbors, or even the general Christian love that we owe to all believers. Rather, Proverbs is focused on our need for close friends to help us bear the burdens and the suffering of this life, and to help us avoid the spiritual dangers of this life. We read that we need friends who will stick with us in difficulties, who will speak difficult truths to us that we need to hear, who know us well, and who are committed to us in particular – we need such friends in order to live the Christian life well.

The Book of Ecclesiastes confirms this: A close friend helps us in the toil of this world, they help us when we stumble in this life, they keep us warm in the coldness of this world, and they defend us from the adversaries of this world. Biblical wisdom tells us these things are true.

We can have a tendency to think as if, were we really spiritual, we wouldn't need other people so much – then God alone would be enough for us.

But the Apostle Paul tells us that even then we need such Christian friendships.

In our text from First Thessalonians, Paul begins by telling the Christians in Thessalonica about all they have in the gospel, and he assures them that they have communion with Jesus Christ, the Son of God. What a tremendous spiritual blessing. Surely, that alone, should be enough for them, right?

But then, in verse eleven Paul says to them: “Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.”

Immediately after assuring them of all they have in Christ, Paul reaffirms that they need other people – they need close Christian friends to live the Christian life well. Salvation does not eliminate our need for deep relationships, but makes that need even more clear.

But the need goes even deeper than that. And we are reminded of that in Genesis 2.

God makes Adam. And Adam is perfect – he is without sin. And Adam, perfect, and free from sin, is placed in paradise. He is placed in the literal Garden of Eden. And God himself is present there with him. And God looks at the situation, he says “It is not good.” He says: “It is not good that the man should be alone.”

In response, God makes Eve. And we are right here to see the creation of marriage specifically. But we also need to see in this the creation of, and the need for, friendship more generally.

The Bible tells us that not everyone is called to marriage. But everyone is called to friendship. For whatever someone's marital status may be, the fact remains that it is not good for man (or for woman) to be alone.

And God's answer to that is not just marriage – and it's not just one friendship. His answer is a network of relationships. For God called Adam and Eve to fill the earth with people – people whom they would know, and love and be close to. That is what we were made for.

And on some level, we know this.

As one writer points out, if we imagine it ourselves – if we had all the material blessings of this world, all the riches, good food, a nice home, and all the comforts we could imagine – and if we ourselves were freed from sickness and death, to live forever in paradise – if we were given all that, but then required to enjoy it alone ... with no other human beings present to see, or to know, or to share experiences with ... how long would it take for that heaven to start to feel like a hell?

That is the value of friendship. That is its worth. And that is not a fault in us – the Bible tells us that God made us for others ... he made us for friendship. [Aelred, III.76-78]

That is the first thing for us to see here: the need for friendship.

## The Lack of Friendship

That then brings us to the second thing for us to consider: the lack of friendship.

We are part of a larger culture that has a lot of poverty and lack when it comes to the topic of friendship.

For one thing, in our culture, people don't have many close friends. We live in the most individualistic culture in the history of the world, and each year the isolation and disconnection from one another seems to get worse.

And that has been the case for quite some time.

The Dutch theologian Herman Bavinck, after visiting America in 1892 said this – he wrote: “Work, eat, sleep – this is the substance of American life. There is no time left for convivial friendship and conversation.” [In Eglinton, 310]

Bavinck's focus wasn't on leisure, but on relationships. Americans, he noted, filled their lives with work, and eating, and sleeping, and left no time for the kind of interactions that cultivate deep friendships.

And since then it's gotten even worse.

A 2006 study from Duke University reported, from 1985 to 2004, an almost 30% drop in the number of close confidantes Americans said they had. That's a 30% drop just in the span of 20 years. In that same survey one in four of those surveyed in 2004 said they had *no one at all* to confide in. [NPR, “Social Isolation”]

And that was in 2004. Just to be clear, 2004 is three years before the first iPhone was introduced, and two years before Facebook would even allow non- students to have a social media account with them ... and sixteen years before a pandemic and global lockdown would isolate people even further.

So a lot has happened since that study. But one thing that has not happened is that we have not gotten better at making, and deepening friendships.

And a more recent study from this past June bears that out, showing that from 1990 to 2021, the percentage of Americans who report that they have no close friends has quadrupled, while the percentage of Americans who say they have more than five good friends has dropped by almost half in that same period. [Cox, 4]

There is a lack of actual friendships in our culture. And it keeps getting worse.

But then, to add to the problem, we often lack the ability to even address the issue – whether abstractly or concretely.

First of all, in the abstract, we have, in many ways, lost the category of stable, deep friendships. Life has become more transient, and with that, social connections have become more tenuous. And

in a culture that values individualism and personal freedom as ours does, it is no surprise that deep, committed friendships are not valued.

One theologian points out that for most people today friendship is seen “as the least committed of relationships [...], as the freest, most preference-driven, and most affection-dependent relationship that is possible for people to enjoy.” [Hill, *Washed and Waiting*, 194-195] In the eyes of many Christians even, friendship is treated as the most vaporous kind of relationship – and one we can walk away from at any time, for any reason, or for no reason at all. [Hill, *Spiritual Friendship*, xiv] In the abstract, we have lost a deeper, more biblical, concept of friendship.

But then, in concrete ways, we have also lost the ability to address the issue.

As a culture we have become open to people identifying and seeking help for all kinds of needs and areas of lack in their lives. But it’s still pretty taboo to tell someone we need help because we don’t have any real friends. This is a real problem, that, as we’ve said, millions of Americans have, but we don’t know how to talk about it – let alone what to do with it. So we treat the admission as taboo, and make those struggling with isolation feel ashamed for it.

And the church isn’t that different. Think of it like this. How many Christian books, and conferences, and ministries do you know of that exist to help Christians think and act more biblically in their marriages? A lot, right? And how many books, conferences, and ministries do you know of that exist to help Christians think and act more biblically in their parenting? Quite a few. And how many books, and conferences, and ministries do you know of that exist to help Christians think and act more biblically in their career, or their finances, or their political engagement? Quite a number.

And yet ... how many books, or conferences, or ministries do you know of that exist to help Christians think and act more biblically in developing close Christian friendships?

Do you know of any?

To find something solid on the subject, I ended up going back over 850 years, to the work of a 12<sup>th</sup> century monastic pastor named Aelred of Rievaulx.

Aelred of Rievaulx was born in the year 1110 in Hexham, England. He wanted to pursue a call to pastoral ministry, but due to certain restrictions Rome was imposing on the church in England at the time, he was only allowed to pursue that calling if he did so within a monastic community. And so he did. Aelred entered the Cistercian Abby at Rievaulx, and in 1147 he was elected as their abbot. Under his leadership and care the ministry grew from 300 inhabitants to about 650. And while directing and pastoring the community, Aelred also wrote. [Dutton, 13-18]

One work he wrote was a dialogue titled *Spiritual Friendship*, written as a conversation between Aelred and three other monks, on the nature of friendship.

In it, Aelred provides a practical taxonomy of friendship, a theology of spiritual friendship, and an exhortation to the beauty, and the gift, and the necessity of Christian friendship.

He writes: “Friendship so cushions adversity and chastens prosperity that among mortals almost nothing can be enjoyed without a friend.” [II.10] Quoting Cicero, he says that “those who banish friendship from life seem to pluck the sun from the universe, for we have no better, no more delightful blessing from God.” [II.49]

Aelred argues that we need deep and spiritual friendships *because we were made for deep and spiritual friendships*.

## **The Categories of Friendship**

That then brings us to our third point: the categories of friendship.

But before even getting to that, Aelred lays out some of the foundations of true friendship.

First of all, while true friendship requires love, it is not reducible to Christian love. It is actually something more than that.

Love is something we are called to have for all people: for friends, neighbors, and even enemies. What sets friendship apart from love is that in addition to love, in true friendship “we entrust our heart and all its contents” to another person, and they entrust the same to us. [Aelred, I.32]

Second, true friendship, Aelred explains, requires a solid foundation that can ultimately only be found in God. True friendship, he writes: “must begin in Christ, continue with Christ, and be perfected by Christ.” [I.10]. And built on that foundation, true friendship includes a unity over human and divine truths, an affectionate attachment, a mutual trustworthy love, and good will for one another. [I.11,15,47]

From there, Aelred goes on to speak of false friendship, of what I will call common friendship, and then of the deeper form of what he calls “spiritual friendship,” which he especially exhorts us to pursue.

### *False Friendships*

So first, we might consider the category of false friendship. These are friendships that, ultimately, are not about the good of the other person, but what we want to sinfully get from them.

One form of this that Aelred points to is what he calls carnal friendship. This is a friendship that is rooted in sins of pleasure. So, for example, there might be real affection between two individuals who are both married to other people but are having an affair together. But their friendship is a false one, because while real affection and connection might exist there, the two people are not only sinning against God themselves, but they are encouraging the other person to sin as well, and thus damaging rather than helping the other person’s soul. And so while affection might seem to exist there, it is ultimately a false friendship. And many other friendships that revolve around either overt sin or shared idolatries can be the same way. They are, in the end, false. [I.39-40]

Another form of false friendship is what Aelred calls “worldly friendship.” This is a friendship that is essentially a means to a self-centered end. You might be working with someone else, - you might even enjoy working with them - but ultimately, your chief concern is for yourself, without a higher regard of Christian love for the other person. [I.42-44]

Aelred, drawing from others, describes these worldly friendships like this – he writes: “‘There is a friend who is one when the time suits but will not stand by in your day of trouble.’ Remove his hope of reward, and at once he ceases to be your friend. Someone has satirized such a friendship

in neat verse: ‘One who comes in good fortune and goes in misfortune / Loves not the person but the person’s purse.’ [I.43]

Maybe you’ve been hurt by these kinds of false friendship. Maybe you have done it to someone else. Maybe you’ve seen someone you love hurt by such false friendships. Whatever the details may be, Aelred reminds us that while these kinds of relationships can look like friendship, because they lack a genuine Christian love for the good of the other person – they are ultimately false friendships, empty of real substance.

### Common Friendships

A second category of friendships is what I’ll call common friendships. These are friendships that are not bad – they are actually good and necessary, and we should value them in our lives. But they still lack the depth of spiritual friendship, which we will say more about in a moment.

And, again, we might consider a few forms common friendships might take. [Note: Aelred of Rievaulx actually does not develop this category much. He speaks of non-sinful forms of “carnal” friendships [III.85-87; II.57] which I have here labeled “friendships of personal enjoyment,” and developed the positive side of more. I also think that that concept then suggests the possibility of non-sinful “worldly” friendships, which I have labeled and developed as “friendships of comradery.” But I should be up-front that I am here trying to follow and further develop Aelred’s thoughts beyond where he takes them in *Spiritual Friendship*, and so any errors are mine alone, not his.]

The first is what we’ll call a friendship of personal enjoyment. This is just what it sounds like – a friendship where we simply enjoy the company of and interactions with the other person. We enjoy being with them, spending time with them, and so on. There is real affection and concern for one another. But, at the same time, there is not a real commitment to one another, and not necessarily a higher-than-normal level of trust between us, and the relationship does not necessarily go very deep. But still, it is a positive common friendship of personal enjoyment, and a good thing.

Second, there is what I’ll call a friendship of comradery. This is a friendship that develops as we pursue a good common goal with someone else. It is the friendship that develops as we work with others on a team, whether in the workplace, in the church, or in a community. It can form a strong bond, such as when soldiers face battle together, or a weaker bond, such as when a casual sports team plays together. It can be about serious labor or about a hobby. But as we work alongside others, towards a good common goal, this kind of friendship often develops.

Common friendships are important in the church and in the world. After all, we cannot have deep intimate friendships with everyone. These common friendships are meaningful and have many positive aspects to them. And as Christians, we can and should seek out and value these relationships.

But even as we acknowledge that, we must also see that there is something else beyond common friendships, which Aelred, and the Scriptures call us to pursue in life.

After all, friendships of enjoyment can be a delight, but they do not include a deep commitment to one another. And friendships of comradery may draw us close together for a time, but usually the common, earthly, goal supersedes the bonds between the individuals. But in Proverbs we read of a friend who sticks closer than a brother, even in the face of adversity. We read of a friend who

will give us earnest counsel even when, in the short-term, it might cause pain for us and them. In Ecclesiastes we read of one who will not only toil by our side and lift us when we fall, but will draw close to us in order to sustain us through the battles and the cold of life. In First Thessalonians we read of one who ministers to our souls, and in Romans 12:10 we read of a friend who has both honor and brotherly affection for us.

### *Spiritual Friendships*

This deeper friendship Aelred refers to as “spiritual friendship.” And he gives four characteristics of this kind of friendship.

The first, which should be obvious, is Christian love. Which means sacrificial love – love that is willing to lay down one’s rights and comforts and possessions for the good of the other – love that looks like Christ’s love. [III.51,98-100]

Second, spiritual friendship should include affection – that inner delight in the other person, the natural attachment and enjoyment of them. Which reminds us again that part of what sets spiritual friendship apart from the kind of love Christians owe to all people is that affection and delight in the other. [III.51]

Third, spiritual friendship is to have reassurance and trust. A true friend in this sense is one we can trust with our secrets, with our inner thoughts, with our hopes and fears and plans – and we can trust a true friend with those things without fear or suspicion that they will misuse that information, or betray our confidence. [III.51] Because of this, Aelred spends a great deal of time encouraging us to be wise and discerning [III.14-59], and to pursue this kind of friendship only with those who are actually worthy of our trust. [III.23,45,46]

Fourth, spiritual friendship is characterized by joyfulness and the blessings that come with sharing both joys and sorrows with another. As Aelred says, true friends in this sense “can be concerned with each other, pray for each other, feel shame at each other’s failures, rejoice in each other’s successes, grieve over the other’s fall as they would over their own, and appreciate the other’s progress as they would their own.” [III.51,101]

And with this sharing and delight and love comes a genuine concern with the spiritual progress of one another, so that such friends really do build one another up spiritually, rooted in their shared love for God.

Taken together, this is a friendship that is rooted in Christ, that is united in his purposes, that includes genuine enjoyment and affection for one another, but then that also includes a real level of trust, and a willingness to minister deeply to one another – both giving and receiving – as you share your struggles and seek to build one another up and bear one another’s burdens, so that you might both grow in your relationship with God.

We know that we need this kind of friendship in our lives, don’t we? Adam needed it, even when he was in paradise and without sin. Solomon knew we needed it if we are to live well in this life. Paul knew we needed it if we are to grow and persevere in the faith. For we were made for such deep relationships.

And yet, so many of us lack them. What then, are we to do?

## **The Path Forward**

This brings us to our fourth point: the path forward. In other words, how do we cultivate these kinds of relationships among us?

And here we need to consider both the organic and the institutional aspects of the church.

We talked about this a few weeks back, but as Abraham Kuyper points out, the church exists both as an organism and as an institution. As an organism, the church is the coming together of the individual Christians, and the organic joining of their relationships into a community, as our congregation. As an institution, the church is the structured aspect of our congregation, with our programs and ministries, the formal role of our officers, leaders, and so on. Both the organic and the institutional aspects of the church are key to its health and life. And both are important in how we think about cultivating relationships and community and friendships in the church.

### *The Individual's Call to Pursue Organic Growth*

Ultimately, deep friendships must be grown. Which means they must be the product of the organic church – the fruit that comes from us as we live our lives together and intentionally seek to connect with one another. Which places the ultimate burden on us, as individuals.

And so, if you do have these kinds of friendships in your life, you need to nurture them, and protect them, and be intentional about continuing to cultivate them.

And if you don't have these kinds of friendships in your life, then you need to take up the responsibility to pursue them. These relationships do not come all at once, they grow over time, and they can't be forced. But they do take a level of intentionality. So ask yourself which relationship, or which common friendship in your life, needs to grow beyond the spiritual shallows. Which surface-level friend might be trustworthy enough to begin to let them into your life a bit more deeply? Who might have a heart to encourage you in your faith? Who could you see yourself rejoicing and grieving with? And how might you pursue them? How might you take the initiative?

These kinds of relationships require individual intentionality. Because they cannot be manufactured by an institution. We can't assign them, or hand them out. They need to be grown in your life. And that is your calling. You need to pursue it, with Christ's help.

### *The Institution's Call to Provide Supportive Structure*

That said, I think that the institutional church does have a very real and important role in this. For while the church cannot manufacture such relationships among us, it can, as an institution, provide some of the structure and support for such friendships to grow.

Fruit trees grow fruit, and they provide their own structure as they do it – they hold up the fruit they produce all on their own, so that the fruit can grow well. And in a culture with a healthy understanding of friendship, and healthy patterns of friendship, the culture itself, and the individuals in it, can often provide the structure and support needed to grow the fruit of deep and meaningful friendships. And when that can happen, that is a wonderful thing.

But, for the most part, we do not live in such a culture. And so additional support may be needed. In our setting, the church's organic life of friendship may be more like a tomato plant than a fruit tree. A tomato plant needs some outside support. It needs a trellis.

In other words, even in our setting the organic church still can grow the fruit of friendship – in fact, it's only the organic aspect that really can. But to do it well, it will need support ... it will need a trellis – a structure that is provided for it, on which it can grow good fruit.

And part of what we are asking ourselves, as a church, in this season ahead, is how we, as an institution, can best provide that support. Our plan to develop a small group ministry (or small group ministries) is in significant part an attempt to provide that kind of structure. While many details still must be decided, we should be clear that the intention is not to try to assign friendships or manufacture community. That's both impossible and undesirable. Rather, the goal is to provide another place of support in the church, where common Christian friendships can grow, and then can even develop into deeper spiritual friendships.

We do, of course, already have places where that is happening here, and we are so thankful for that. Some support structures are already in place, at least for some within our church. Our intention is to further add to that support structure, and encourage the fruit of both common Christian friendship, and deeper spiritual friendship, among us.

But you will still need to be the one who produces that fruit. No institution can do that for you.

### **The Goal Within Our Congregation**

Having considered our path, we should ask, as our final point: What is our goal? What are we hoping and praying to see in our congregation in the years ahead?

And the answer is that we want to see multiple layers of Christian friendship and relationships, overlapping throughout our congregation.

We want to see our congregation united by a friendship of comradery – by the connection that comes as we are all joined together in a common purpose, for the glory of Christ and the kingdom of God.

We want to see, within our congregation, many overlapping circles united by friendship of personal enjoyment – groups of people who sincerely enjoy one another's company, who, in Christian affection, enjoy their fellowship together, and in all sorts of ways delight in each other's presence.

But then, we especially want to see that when you look closer – when you go deeper, under the surface – you find networks of individuals knit together in spiritual friendships: friendships that go deeper, friendships of trust and commitment, friendships in which people are ministering to one another, bearing one another's burdens and building one another up in the Lord, willing to get involved in the mess of one another's lives, and to be the hands and feet of Jesus in difficult situations.

This is what we are praying for, and this is what we want to work to cultivate.

Because such Christian friendships really do help us draw close to the Lord, and follow him as his disciples. As Aelred of Rievaulx puts it: True Christian friendship, “is a step toward the love and knowledge of God.” [II.18; see also III.87]

And, in fact, as we love one another and delight in one another, we in some sense also love and delight in Christ, who is present among his people. And as the people of God love and care for us, we in some way, are being cared for by Christ himself, through his body, the Church.

And with that, such friendships are also a foretaste of the world that is to come.

The world that we await, at Christ’s return, is a world of friendship between God and all of his creatures [III.79]. By faith, Abraham was called a friend of God [James 2:22-23], and as Jesus’s disciples, Jesus calls us his friends [John 15:12-17]. We know that by faith now, but in the world to come, we will see in full our friendship with God.

And that friendship will then extend between all of God’s creatures, so that in the new heaven and the new earth, the kind of friendship that we struggle to find and establish with just a few people in this life, will there be the kind of friendship that covers the earth. It will, Aelred writes, be “pour[ed] out over all and flow back to God from all, for God will be all in all.” [III.134]

Deep friendship is a taste of how we will spend eternity in the City of God. It is what we were made for. It is a glimpse of heaven.

And that is why relationships and community is one of our aspirational values.

Amen.

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**This sermon draws on material from:**

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This sermon draws significantly from my July 7, 2019 evening sermon, titled “Spiritual Friendship”: <https://www.faithtacoma.org/samuel-nicoletti/spiritual-friendship-1-samuel-181-9>