

DUSTIN WENT TO A FLORAL SHOP TO HAVE SOME FLOWERS SENT TO HIS MOTHER 300 MILES AWAY. A YOUNG GIRL WAS SITTING OUTSIDE THE SHOP CRYING. SHE HAD ONLY A DOLLAR AND A SINGLE ROSE FOR HER MOTHER COST TWO.

DUSTIN INVITED HER IN WITH HIM AND HE BOUGHT HER A ROSE AS HE MADE HIS ORDER. AS SHE WAS LEAVING, HE OFFERED HER A RIDE AND THEY DROVE... TO A CEMETERY, WHERE THE GIRL LAID HER ROSE ON HER MOTHER'S GRAVE.

DUSTIN TOOK THE GIRL HOME, RETURNED TO THE SHOP, CANCELED HIS ORDER, BOUGHT A BOUQUET, AND DROVE 300 MILES TO DELIVER MOM'S FLOWERS.

DUSTIN WAS A FRIEND TO BOTH THE GIRL AND HIS MOTHER. FRIENDS ARE BOUND BY LOVE AND MOTHERS TRULY DESERVE A LITTLE RETURN ON THEIR LOVE. I DON'T HAVE TO TELL YOU THE SACRIFICES A MOTHER MAKES.

A FRIEND IS A MUG OF HOT COCOA ON A DAMP NIGHT, A BEAUTIFUL ORCHARD IN THE MIDDLE OF A DESERT, A PAIR OF OPEN ARMS IN A SOCIETY OF SINNERS. A FRIEND IS THERE FOR YOU. (cross)

JESUS SAYS TO THE DISCIPLES: I HAVE CALLED YOU FRIENDS. THINK ABOUT THAT. LET IT SINK IN. YOU'RE NOT ALWAYS THE BEST FRIEND TO JESUS, YET HE ALWAYS TREATS YOU AS HIS FRIEND. HE DRIVES THE 300 MILES TO BRING YOU FLOWERS. ACTUALLY, HE COMES ALL THE WAY FROM HEAVEN AND IN HIS HANDS ARE THE NAIL SCARS OF UNSPEAKABLE LOVE THAT BUST OPEN YOUR GRAVE!

SO, WHEN HE SAYS: THIS IS MY COMMANDMENT, THAT YOU LOVE ONE ANOTHER AS I HAVE LOVED YOU, HE ISN'T TELLING YOU TO EARN YOUR TRIP TO HEAVEN OR TO PROVE YOUR COMMITMENT TO HIM; HE NEEDS YOU TO BE A FRIEND.

IF YOU ARE MY FRIEND, I WANT THE BEST FOR YOU. I WANT PEOPLE TO THINK WELL OF YOU. I WANT NO HARM TO COME TO YOU. YET, FRIENDSHIPS ARE ALSO FORGED IN THE MIDST OF SUFFERING - SOLDIERS IN A TRENCH, PATIENTS IN A HOSPITAL, FOLKS GOING THROUGH A NATURAL DISASTER TOGETHER.

FRIENDS SHARE IN THE MATERIAL WORLD AND WHAT'S INSIDE. C. S. LEWIS SAYS, FRIENDSHIP IS BORN AT THAT MOMENT WHEN ONE PERSON SAYS TO ANOTHER, 'WHAT! YOU, TOO? I THOUGHT I WAS THE ONLY ONE. JESUS KNEW ALL THE JOY AND SORROW WE KNOW. HE WAS TEMPTED LIKE US. WE DON'T HAVE TO HIDE A THING FROM HIM; HE'S THERE FOR US. WE HAVE A FRIEND IN GOD'S SON.

LIKE A DEAR FRIEND, JESUS GIVES HIS BEST FOR US AND EXPECTS THE BEST FROM US. HE COMES NEAR IN BAPTISM AND SCRIPTURE, ABSOLUTION AND LITURGY AND HOLY COMMUNION SO WE CAN BEAR THE FRUIT OF LOVE FOR HIM.

HE IS THE VINE; WE ARE THE BRANCHES. HE DOESN'T GIVE UP ON US WHEN WE DISAPPOINT HIM. HE LOVES US SO WELL THAT HE EXPECTS THAT WE WON'T BE DISAPPOINTED IN HIM WHEN THINGS GO DIFFERENTLY THAN WE EXPECT. WE HAVE THREE WITNESSES TO HIS GRACE: SPIRIT, WATER AND BLOOD! THE SPIRIT CONNECTS US TO THE SAVING WATER AND BLOOD THAT FLOWED FROM HIS SIDE THROUGH BAPTISM AND HIS WONDERFUL SUPPER.

2 **FRIENDSHIP OFTEN REQUIRES SACRIFICE OF SOME SORT, AND, IN SOME RARE CASES, EVEN THE SUPREME SACRIFICE. NO ONE HAS GREATER LOVE THAN THIS, TO LAY DOWN ONE'S LIFE FOR ONE'S FRIEND. BOY, ARE WE LOVED!**

A VIETNAMESE ORPHANAGE WAS BOMBED. THE MISSIONARIES AND A FEW CHILDREN WERE KILLED. ONE 8-YEAR-OLD GIRL WAS BLEEDING TO DEATH. WHEN A NAVY DOCTOR AND NURSE ARRIVED, THEY FOUND A YOUNG BOY NAMED HENG WITH THE RIGHT BLOOD. WITH BROKEN VIETNAMESE AND FRENCH, THEY EXPLAINED THAT HIS BLOOD COULD REPLACE THE GIRL'S BLOOD, SO SHE'D LIVE.

HE BEGAN TO SLOWLY NOD HIS HEAD, THEN DROPPED HIS HEAD DOWN, AND NODDED AGAIN. HE WAS LAID DOWN ON A PIECE OF WOOD AND THE NEEDLE WAS INSERTED IN HIS VEIN. HE SHUDDERED, COVERING HIS FACE WITH HIS FREE HAND.

DOES IT HURT? ASKED THE DOCTOR. **HENG SHOOK HIS HEAD NO, BUT WITH EYES TIGHTLY CLOSED AND A FIST IN HIS MOUTH TO STIFLE HIS SOBS, IT WAS CLEAR THAT SOMETHING WAS WRONG.**

A VIETNAMESE NURSE ARRIVED AND SEEING HENG'S DISTRESS, SPOKE TO HIM, LISTENED TO HIM, ANSWERED HIM, AND STROKED HIS FOREHEAD. HENG SETTLED, OPENED HIS EYES, AND A LOOK OF RELIEF SPREAD OVER HIS FACE.

THE VIETNAMESE NURSE TOLD THE AMERICANS: HENG MISUNDERSTOOD YOU. HE THOUGHT HE WAS GIVING ALL HIS BLOOD TO SAVE THE LITTLE GIRL.

WHY WOULD HE BE WILLING TO DIE FOR HER? ASKED THE NAVY NURSE.

THE VIETNAMESE NURSE REPEATED THE QUESTION TO HENG, WHO ANSWERED SIMPLY, BECAUSE...SHE IS MY FRIEND.

YOU HAVE A FRIEND LIKE HENG. THAT YOU MIGHT HAVE LIFE, YOUR FRIEND GAVE HIS BLOOD ON A PIECE OF WOOD WITH A SPEAR INSERTED IN HIS VEIN. NO ONE HAS GREATER LOVE THAN TO LAY DOWN HIS LIFE FOR HIS FRIENDS.

HE IS RISEN. THAT MEANS YOU WILL RISE TO EVERLASTING LIFE, TOO. SO, YOU CAN LOVE YOUR FRIENDS TO DEATH, AND LIVE! THE COMMAND TO LOVE IS WRAPPED IN THE ETERNAL GRACE OF GOD. FRIENDS OF JESUS BEFRIEND OTHERS.

JESUS CHOSE YOU TO LOVE FOR HIM, NOT BECAUSE YOU'RE SO GOOD AT IT, BUT BECAUSE HE LOVES YOU. THERE'S A BUMPER STICKER THAT READS: FRIENDS DON'T LET FRIENDS DIE WITHOUT JESUS. IT SHOULD READ: FRIENDS DON'T LET FRIENDS LIVE WITHOUT JESUS. JESUS IS MORE THAN LIFE INSURANCE; HE GIVES PEACE AND JOY, HOPE AND PURPOSE, AND COMFORT RIGHT NOW; HE IS LIFE!

A FRIEND IS THERE FOR YOU. THE FLIP-SIDE OF THAT IS FOUND IN CHARLIE BROWN'S PROFOUND INSIGHT: A FRIEND IS SOMEONE WHO STICKS UP FOR YOU WHEN YOU ARE NOT THERE.

YOU KNOW JESUS HAS YOUR BACK. AND, WHEN HE CALLS YOU HOME, THE REST OF US WILL TELL PEOPLE THAT YOU WERE JESUS' FRIEND. UNTIL THEN, YOUR SMALLEST ACT OF LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP OFFERS THE CRUCIFIED CHRIST TO OTHERS. LIVE LIFE LOVED, BECAUSE...CHRIST IS RISEN!