

Funeral Service Sgt. Amy Krueger Saturday Nov. 14, 2009 John 15:12-17

**"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should last; so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. This I command you, to love one another."**

*"The 'Rank' of Friendship"*

What is a friend? Friends are people with whom you dare to be yourself. Your soul can be naked with them. They ask you to put on nothing, only to be what you are. They do not want you to be better or worse.

When you are with them, you feel as a prisoner feels who has been declared innocent. You do not have to be on your guard. You can say what you think, as long as it is genuinely you. Friends understand those contradictions in your nature that lead others to misjudge you.

With friends you breathe freely. You can avow your little vanities and envies and hates and vicious sparks, your meannesses and absurdities, and in opening them up to friends, they are lost, dissolved on the white ocean of their loyalty.

Friends understand. You do not have to be careful. You can abuse them, neglect them, tolerate them. Best of all, you can keep still with them. It makes no matter. They like you. They understand. You can weep with them, sing with them, laugh with them, pray with them. Through it all--and underneath--they see, know, and love you. A friend? What is a friend? A friend is with whom you dare to be yourself.

(C. Raymond Beran, in *Bits & Pieces*, September 19, 1991, p. 3-4.)

Is this the definition of friendship that Mike read, that Jesus gives us? Close, yes, but Jesus takes friendship to another rank by adding that there is no greater love one can have for a friend than to lay down one's life for them. You see, that first rank of friendship many of us acquire too, and as noble as it is, it pales in comparison to the rank of friendship that Jesus calls us too. Jesus' rank of friendship is far more radical. (What's new, everything he said and did was radical.) His rank of friendship is a willingness to spend oneself for the other with eagerness, without grudge, and without weighing the cost. Aristotle said, that this rank of friendship "seems to lie in the loving, rather than in the being loved."

It's true, most of us do not have the opportunities to step into the rank of friendship Jesus is talking about. And clearly, if we get to go all the way to where he suggests it'll be a one-time gesture of the highest test of love for a friend. *The question is*, would you be willing...are you willing? Amy was. Amy entered the military willing to serve her country. She did this because she was stricken and inspired by the suffering she saw on 09/11. She was willing despite the knowledge that her rank of friendship could reach its maximum capacity as defined by Jesus.

The rank of friendship Amy was signing up for carries a price, although one may not actually *have to* pay it, one need be willing to. It reminds me of a story former President Ronald Reagan once told. During World War II, Reagan's job was to review letters of recommendations. Many of these letters resulted in soldiers receiving the Congressional Medal of Honor.

One letter told of a gunner who was trapped in a hole in the bottom of a B-29 bomber, following a crippling attack. The landing gear of the plane was destroyed, and the captain did not know if he could land the plane without the gunner being killed.

As it turned out, that decision never had to be made. As the plane neared England, the captain realized that they would never reach an airstrip anyway. He ordered everyone to bail out. As the last man stood there ready to jump, he watched the captain take *off* his parachute. He knelt down beside the gunner still trapped helplessly in the hole and said, "Sergeant, looks like you and I are going to land this thing together." He did not forsake the young soldier even at the risk of his own life. That's love. That's the rank of friendship Jesus is talking about. That's love like God's love for you and me.

Amy served one of the largest organizations in the world bearing her fruit, giving of herself to those who had given of themselves. Her service was abundant, and more important, everlasting, because her rank of friendship was not self-centered but other-centered. Did the military teach her this? Perhaps; they're pretty good at taking a person, filtering out their insecurities and defiance and reforming them toward a greater rank of friendship. But when Amy initially dashed to the Army recruitment center to serve her country after 9/11, she did so because she *already had* "love for the other"...she already had a rank of friendship.

Now we all know her initial intention was to go kick some Bin Laden-butt. *And*, as with any new commitment the mission of that commitment evolves; it evolves into a more mature and sophisticated commitment. Let's be clear about her commitment, she went because of all of you. She went for all of us. And now she has come Home. Her physical body stays here with us in her community, close to her family and friends.

Her spirit however is now so vast it cannot be contained. So make no mistake, when you feel her, she is there. When you mention her, she is there. When you think you smell her, she is there. When you think you hear her, she is there. When you cry out to her, she is there. When you tell her you love her, she is there. Let's not be limited in what the resurrection of Jesus taught us. He didn't die when he died, and neither do we. She lives. Make no mistake, Fort Hood does not have the last word, the resurrection says so, she lives.

Let us pray: Healing God, give us the faith, remove the obstacles from our hearts that limit our Oneness with you and with Amy. Help us to see, feel, and know, she lives. Amen.