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Soul Friends

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12; Philippians 1:1-11

“Every time I think of you, I thank God for you.”¹

Sitting in a prison cell, Paul wrote to the church of Philippi, the home of Lydia, the first place in Europe Paul preached.

His letter, a balance of pain and joy, is held together by a chord of loving devotion shared between himself and his people. Their communal love acting as life support.

This kind of connection, this friendship, is divinely profound.

Many epistles share this tender love for the churches they address, and as they encourage, they also speak Divine truths and insights - they convict *through* their faith in one another. One almost senses a holy tethering — a shared listening to the will of God for one another.

This kind of connection, the holy or soul friendship is often perplexing - not something we can curate. Or even explain. Often a sure sign that God is up to something.

¹ Philippians 1:3-5

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I was a youth minister attending the institute for youth ministry forum in 2016. A group of us came together as a cohort, unsure of one another, with little in common other than our vocation. And yet. There was something pulling us together. One night, we sat in Erdman and talked into the wee hours, passionately disagreeing on theology, and yet loving one another through it. It was the best church service I ever attended.

But this made little sense.

We didn't know one another, and yet in that moment and beyond, we have remained connected - they have remained my anchor in so many times of discernment, of grief, of joy. They're still some of the first people I call. An inexplicable and holy connection. And yet, so true.

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You see, at the very beginning of creation, God declared that it is not good for us to be alone.² It is through community, we are blessed — and it's in the presence of these holy friends, we are continually reminded of God's uncompromising love for us. These kinds of friends are like a divine intervention — a balm for our souls.

Modern society so often tells us that success is tied to rugged individualism — the pinnacle reached when we are able to pursue private satisfactions independently of others.

And we can chose to embrace this life of stoic individuality

² Genesis 2:18

Walled off from those around us

Because individualism is a seductive tempter

To be able to say I did this all by myself

To neglect the communion of saints

But in the example of Christ who called his disciples friends³,

And again in these epistles, there is

A pattern of gratitude and friendship, of deep and vulnerable care

a model of holding your people close and of telling the truth

And through this example, an assertion emerges that these kinds of friendships are intrinsically important to the ministry

The other day, I had a moment of profound spiritual pain, and I needed to talk to someone — but it was someone specific. It was as though I knew she was the person for this moment.

This isn't someone with whom I have a casual bond, not really - and yet, we both share a feeling of profound closeness to one another. An instant and unfiltered trust.

³ John 15:15

That day, this person listened to my concern, but they also listened to the spirit behind my words — they paid attention to the movement of God within the moment that had frightened me.

A soul friend is someone with whom you can be vulnerable

A soul friend is one who you let in

Always

Because it's always safe to do so. Even when it's hard.

Holy friends are the ones who know your riptide - they know the things that can pull you under.

They call you on your self doubt, and believe in you even when you can't see why.

A holy friend believes in you,

Not *only* because they believe in you

But because they believe in the God who is working *through* you

Victoria White, writes, “Holy friends push me to accomplish abundantly far more than I could ask or imagine for myself, my vocation, and God’s work in the world. They address the gap between who I am and who God is calling me to be. Holy friends help us see the world around us not only through the eyes of others but through God’s eyes so we can come alongside God’s

work in the world.... Holy friendships are among God's greatest gifts to us, designed to support our flourishing."⁴

In this kind of friendship, one glimpses the love and devotion of God as glimmering in the heart of another. And together, you are co-listeners to the Spirit.

So, when you have someone in your life who has been a holy friend to you — tell them

Make it weird.

It's vulnerable and uncomfortable, but it could result in the discovery of a treasured connection

Or at the very least, you have simply shared the love that was on your heart with another

And that can be holy too

Just don't do this thing alone. We can't.

We all have such incredible dreams for and callings on our lives,

Let holy friends, let soul friends support you

Hear *their* voices when the world is too loud, and God is too quiet

Be reminded in their love that you matter.

And that it's beautiful, and it's holy, to need each other.

⁴ *Holy Friendships*, Victoria White

Benediction:

This idea of a holy friend is difficult to explain adequately — it's one of those obnoxious you know it when you feel it things. So I hope that perhaps at least in the stories that I have told today, you felt a glimmer of familiarity, something that tugged at your heart strings, a person who came to mind.

Reach out to them. Enter gladly into the communion of saints.

It's a gift to need each other.