

Lent 4: 18th March Reflection Notes

Topic: An invitation to getting to know our friend and exploring our friend's address book

In this week's Lenten reflections we focus on two essential chapters in the book by Trevor Hudson titled, *Friendship with God: How God's offer of intimate relationship can change your life*. In our reflections I wish to highlight a number of points made by Rev Hudson in each chapter.

Focusing on the invitation to getting to know God, Rev Hudson highlights that the main assertion one can make about the Christian faith is that, "by getting to know Jesus as our friend, we get to know God as God really is" (Pg 32). A gospel moment that further alludes to this point is of the encounter between Phillip, one of the disciples, and Jesus in John 14: 8-9. In this reading, Philip went to Jesus and asked, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Then Jesus answered him saying, "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father." Therefore, Hudson believes that the open secret of the Gospel is that, "as we keep company with Jesus, He leads us to the heart and life of God." So, in this book chapter (copies attached) we explore ways on how to get closer to Jesus as a friend and in turn get to know God better. But there is an important aspect of this friendship we need to note. Being a friend with Jesus and pleasing Him as a friend will require for us to do what he commands (see John 15: 14). Obedience therefore is key in this friendship and doing good is not optional for those who seek friendship with Him. Good thing to note is that Jesus does not impose himself and his teachings on us a burdensome yoke to carry but rather he intends that through the teachings we can be the best of that God has created and willed for us to be. That's a good friend, right? One who seeks out the best for those whom He loves and regards as dear friends. For Rev Hudson, one of the good places to start to begin our practical obedience to make a deliberate and "conscious decision to become a loving person." (pg 37).

A few questions for reflection:

1. What do you think about the bottom line of the Christian faith suggested by Rev Hudson in this section?
2. What do you find most/least attractive about Jesus of Nazareth?
3. What is your experience of meditating on the gospel-story?
4. What kind of attention have you given to the words of Jesus in your life?
5. How do you respond to Jesus right now?

In the second part of our reflections this evening we would have also explored, as part of knowing our friend, where can we seek to encounter and meet our friend. Trevor Hudson offers an image where the gospel serves as a directory which offers a number of spaces, which he calls the 'addresses,' of where we can encounter Christ. He highlights a number of "gospel addresses, namely, Holy Communion, the gathering of two or three in His name, and in the company of the vulnerable and lonely. In this chapter (attached) we are led to look at the spaces which Christ himself was encountered by those who met him in his earthly ministry. Furthermore, this is where God is deeply revealed and those who seek friendship with God through Christ, need to engage in these spaces much more frequently. Sharing regularly in the worship life of our community, in this case RandMeth, and other spaces where you congregate with fellow believers, offers a great opportunity to get to know

and meet Christ as a friend. These are spaces where we share in the word of God, pray together and learn together. Therefore, the address book is for our navigation in this journey to know our friend. Though not explicitly mentioned in the gospels but implied in the household churches in the books of Acts is what we Methodists call Class meetings/Cell groups/ Bible Study groups. This is where each member is grouped and allocated into a small group to meet and reflect for spiritual growth through the experience of others in their walk with Christ. Do you belong to a Bible Study group or a small group and are a full member of the church? This may be a good time to consider being part of one if you're not already part of.

Questions for personal reflection:

1. What does communion mean for you?
2. How have you experienced Christian human friendship?
3. What have you learnt from your encounters with those who suffer?
4. Which other 'addresses' in the gospel can you think of that would grow your intimate relationship with God?
5. What "gospel address" attracts you the most? Why?
6. What "gospel address" do you resist the most and why?

Wishing you a blessed time of reflection. May I ask that we continue to uphold in prayer our country and the world in light of the Coronavirus pandemic. Blessings.

CHAPTER 4



UNDERSTANDING PRAYER AS DEEPENING FRIENDSHIP

Ever since I started to follow Jesus as my Divine Friend, I have been learning how to pray. I must confess I still feel very much like a beginner. It does not surprise me one bit that the only time the disciples asked Jesus to teach them anything was when they asked him, 'Lord, teach us how to pray.'¹ Even though they had grown up within the Jewish faith, most probably prayed with their parents and worshipped in the local synagogue, they still wanted to know how to pray. I can identify with them.

You may also want to deepen your life of prayer. You would not be alone in this. Just before South Africa became a democracy, the Church of which I am part engaged in a process called 'Journey to a New Land'. As a Church we wanted to establish our mission priorities in a post-apartheid era. Part of this process was a questionnaire asking members what they were looking for from their church. Over 25 000 members responded. The most frequent request was for a living spirituality. Strikingly, those making this request were people who were already involved in worshipping and praying within their local congregations.

Behind this request I believe there exists a profound longing: We want to experience God in a conscious, personal and intimate way. There are things we want to know. Are we are orphans alone in this vast expanding universe? Is there someone who knows that we are here, who is interested in our little lives and who has our best interests at heart. Is there another reality besides the material?

Theological debates and conversations only take us so far. We have to come to know for ourselves the reality of the living God. This personal sense of knowing is primarily given, I believe, in our experience of prayer.

*There is in God's heart a
passionate longing for friendship with us.*

In the previous chapters, against the background of our loneliness, I explored two basic convictions. The first is that there is in God's heart a passionate longing for friendship with us. The second is that our response to this good news takes the shape of becoming a friend of Jesus. If there is any biblical truth in this, and I believe there is much, then prayer can be helpful in deepening that friendship. Whatever makes for good friendship makes for good prayer. Basil Pennington puts it well, 'Prayer is friendship in action – that high point of friendship when we are simply entering into and experiencing the reality that we and God are friends.'²

A FRIENDSHIP EXERCISE

Think of one significant friendship you currently enjoy. How did this friendship start and grow? What activities nourish this friendship? What do you value most about your friend? How do you contribute to the friendship? Make a list of your responses. Are there any clues here that could help you deepen your life of prayer with your Divine Friend?

I have just done this exercise with some particular friends in mind.
I want to share with you three ingredients of this friendship that I think deepen our life of prayer.

INTENTIONALITY

Good friendships take time, effort and planning. A couple of times each month Debbie and I meet with our friends, either at one of our homes or in a restaurant. This simple arrangement requires one or two phone calls, deciding on a time and place and then making sure we all turn up. Sometimes we may do this even if we don't feel like it. The other day I got a text message from a husband which went like this. 'Thank you for our many Friday nights together. Even though there have been those rare moments when I have not felt like going out, I have always felt better after our time together.'

We need a similar intentionality in our life of prayer. Often someone will say to me that they don't need to pray at specific times because they speak with the Lord all the time. I have little doubt that Jesus is always with us but the quality of our ongoing conversation with Him depends hugely on whether we are able to set aside time on a regular basis to be with Him. We will pray 'always' if we pray intentionally 'sometimes'. So the first thing I encourage you to do, if you want to deepen your life of prayer, is to create a space to be with God on a regular basis.

This regular appointment with the Lord can happen in different ways. Some people are able to carve out some time each day as a daily habit. Others prefer to block out longer periods of time once or twice a week. The challenge is to discover the best possible times to do this. What works for a young mother with two small kids will be different to what is best for a retired person living on their own. We need to be realistic as we shape the rhythm of our praying to the rhythm of our lives. The key factor is intentionality in planning this time.

This often means rethinking the way that we are presently using our time. Most of us, most of the time, find the time to do what we think is important. We give time to eating, to sleeping, to our

daily work, to our favourite TV programmes and so on. If our friendship with Jesus is as important as we say it is, then our schedule needs to reflect this. I know this can be difficult. If we are not producing or doing something worthwhile or ticking off a task from our 'to-do list', then we feel we are wasting our time. But that is exactly what prayer often is: Wasting time with our Divine Friend. Transforming friendship with Jesus simply does not happen without it.

Closely related to planning specific *times* to be with God is finding a suitable *place* to pray. We need to be thoughtful, wise and creative about this. Where can we go where we will not be interrupted? Is there a place which is not too noisy? Could this place be where I live or somewhere else like a nearby church? We read in the gospels that Jesus, in order to spend uninterrupted time with his Father, would often go to a 'lonely place' where He prayed. Little wonder that when He gave instructions about praying, He emphasised the importance of such a place: 'But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father who is unseen.'³

A FRIENDSHIP EXERCISE

Take some to reflect on this past week. How have you spent your time? What are your thoughts and feelings about the way you spend your time? Does your diary reflect what you say is important for you? You might like to talk with the Lord about this and listen to what He may be saying to you through your life at the moment. In the light of this reflection, decide when you will spend one-on-one time with God. Write this down in your diary or put it into your digital calendar so that nothing else will intrude into it.

Think about a place where you can be alone with your Divine Friend. It could be a special chair in the lounge, or a corner in

a bedroom, or even perhaps, if you are fortunate, a spare room that you can convert into a prayer space. Sometimes we can set apart a space for prayer with a simple symbol – a candle, an icon, a crucifix or an empty cross. Or maybe you will decide to make your prayer place away from home – going to your car at lunch-time, popping in at an open church or setting aside a chair at your place of work. Again, the important thing is to be intentional in choosing a place for prayer and not changing it too often.

CONVERSATION

Good friendships happen when there is healthy conversation. When we get together with friends we spend our time talking with and listening to each other. Each person gets an opportunity to share what is happening in their lives and we do our best to be attentive to what is being shared. Both sharing ourselves and listening to each other helps the time to go well. Our time together is spoilt when one of us does not want to share or when someone keeps interrupting or hogging the conversation. Everyone needs to speak and to listen for good communication to take place.

Our friendship with Jesus grows as we talk to Him. I remember how I first did this as a young person. Every night before I went to sleep I would put an empty chair next to my bed. Then I imagined Jesus sitting there and I would share with Him aloud what was happening in my life. My conversation with Him included how I was feeling at that moment, what I was grateful for, what I was sorry about, concerns about others and my requests for help in what I was facing. This was my method of praying for a number of years until I began to learn to do some listening as well.

I continue to talk aloud to my Divine Friend. Just recently I was able to spend a few days alone. One afternoon in my room I

decided to again use an empty chair in my praying. As I sat across from where I imagined Jesus to be sitting, my mind went back to those early days when I had just started to pray. For about an hour I reflected on what my friendship with Jesus had meant to me since my sixteenth year, and I shared my thoughts and feelings aloud with Him. I was ambushed by tears of overwhelming gratitude and thankfulness as I did this.

We never outgrow the need to speak personally and directly to the Lord. Teresa of Avila is one of the great teachers on prayer from centuries back. In her lectures on prayer she insisted on the importance of constantly sharing ourselves with God. However, there was for her one important condition: We need to think about what we are saying. Talking to the Lord without thinking about what you and I are actually saying insults God and puts our praying into the category of superstition and magic. However, when we are thoughtful in our spoken prayer, Teresa believed that such prayer could take us into the very depths of communion with God.

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On the other hand, as in any good friendship, we also need to listen to God. This part of our conversation with the Lord usually takes much longer to develop. It is hard enough trying to listen carefully to someone we can see, let alone to someone we cannot see. We have so many questions. What does it mean to say that God talks to us? How does this happen? How do we know we are not just talking to ourselves? And since we are unsure about these things, we often end up talking all the time. Prayer then becomes a one-way conversation, which is not good for any friendship.

All these questions have been part of my own prayer journey. Thankfully, over the years, I have had some wonderful mentors

and teachers in my life who have helped with these matters. Let me simplify here my most important learning about listening to God and reduce it to one particular insight. It is this: Whatever means God uses to speak to us – whether it is through a sudden memory, a strong feeling, a flash of insight, the words of a friend, the mysteries of creation, or, as it mostly happens, through the Bible – God's voice in our experience usually takes the shape of a certain kind of thought.⁴

So I have been learning not to talk all the time. In the same way that I can only listen to you if I keep quiet, I must stop talking to the Lord if I am going to pay attention to the Divine Whisper. So during my one-on-one time with Jesus there are moments when I am simply silent. These are the moments when I think about what I have read in Scripture, or when I contemplate a gospel story, or when I reflect on my time of conversation with Christ, or when I think about the events of the day. It is during these times that I pay attention to my thoughts and feelings and wonder what God may be saying to me.

But how do we know if what we are hearing is from God? Are there any reliable criteria for discerning whether a thought comes from God and not from some other source? Along with many veterans of the Spirit, I believe there are such criteria. Thoughts from God have a distinctive feel, content and texture about them. They have those characteristics outlined in James 3:17 where we read that 'the wisdom from above is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.' Above all, whatever God says to us will always be consistent with the clear teaching of Jesus that we find in the gospels. This is why an intimate acquaintance with his words is so critical.

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Sometimes when we really need to know what God is saying about a particular situation, but no thoughts stand out with this kind of distinctiveness, it can be helpful to imagine what God might be saying. This happens in our ordinary friendships. On the basis of our times spent together, we have a hunch what a good friend would say to us. For example, if you were to ask me now what our friends think about the present South African situation or what they believe are important values for business or what they feel about our relationship, I could tell you with some accuracy what they might say. Through our shared times together I have come to know their opinions on certain matters. It can work like this with God, too. So try this:

A FRIENDSHIP EXERCISE

Speak with the Lord about one particular situation going on in your life at the moment. Then stop talking, be quiet for a while and ask yourself, 'In the light of what I have come to know about God in the Bible, through the teachings of Jesus in the gospels, through what I have learnt in my faith community and through my own experience of the Divine Friendship over the years, what do I think God *might* be saying to me about this situation?' You can write this down and think about it a bit more, or speak about it with someone you trust.

TRANSPARENCY

Good friendships invite, nurture and require growing transparency. One of the most important ingredients of our couple-friendship is the growing freedom we have to be honest with each other. As trust develops between us, so we are able to take off those masks

we sometimes wear. This has not happened overnight. When we have harboured feelings of disappointment or resentment, and not expressed them, our friendship has limped along politely. But as we have gradually taken the risk of self-disclosure, of sharing honestly what we feel and think, the friendship bonds between us have deepened and become a source of much joy.

The parallels with our Divine Friendship stand out strongly. When we do not express what we are thinking and feeling to the Lord, a sense of distance grows between us. Telltale symptoms that indicate we are not being emotionally honest with God are typically things like boredom and staleness, and dull formality in our prayer. Whenever we keep our more 'negative' feelings and attitudes away from God in prayer, we hinder the movement towards intimacy. Perhaps this could be why Martin Luther once suggested that the most important principle for anyone wanting to grow their life of prayer is 'Don't lie to God!'

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and disappointments, our anger and resentment,
our loneliness and grief.*

What does this transparency look like in practice? It means sharing what we are actually thinking and feeling right now, not what we think we should say. Polite prayer poisons our relationship with God. Honest prayer involves sharing our doubts and disappointments, our anger and resentment, our loneliness and grief. Sometimes we may need to verbalise powerful feelings of anger and bitterness, and even hatred towards God. Or we might be in the throes of a very dark and demonic temptation and on the brink of giving in. James Martin sums it up for me when he says, 'Be honest with God about everything.'⁵

Some people think this is a waste of time because God knows

what we are going to say anyway. I don't believe this. The purpose of being transparent with God is not to give information to God. It is about a growing intimacy with the Lord. A recent moment with my daughter illustrates this. Some months ago she faced a lengthy operation on her jaw. I knew she was apprehensive about what could go wrong. On the Sunday before the surgery she came to hear me preach. After the service she came up to me and said, 'I am scared about the op. Will you pray with me?' In that moment she was not giving me information that I did not have. She was sharing vulnerably, and by being totally honest, deepening the closeness in our relationship.

A FRIENDSHIP EXERCISE

Find some time to be alone with your Divine Friend. Share with Him whatever you are feeling right now about your relationship. It could be gratitude, regret, disappointment, anger, longing or a sense of being forsaken. Whatever it may be, find words to express yourself aloud to the Lord as honestly as you can, rather than just thinking about it.

In this chapter I have tried to focus on prayer as the means of deepening friendship. There is obviously much more to prayer than what I have written here. But those other themes of prayer, like praying for others, or ministering to others in healing prayer, or deliverance prayer, only find their proper place when we are in a healthy relationship with God ourselves. And if we really want to be good friends with God and experience that intimate connection for which we have been made, then we will need to share in conversation with God in an intentional and transparent way.

CHAPTER 5



LOOKING OUTWARD TOGETHER

carefully. What have been some of your own personal experiences of pain? How do they connect with the experiences of those around you? What 'human cry' in your community do you hear the loudest? What are your own special gifts and how could you use them to make God's dream become a reality in your local community? As you talk about these responses with your Divine Friend, are there any clues as to what your little piece of God's dream might be?

In closing this chapter, let me emphasise the main point one last time. As friends of Jesus, we are invited to look outward in the same direction as Him. His dream for the world is the same as God's dream. He calls us to live with Him in tune with this Divine dream. We do this in our friendships, our places of daily work and in our broken communities. Perhaps we can end with a simple prayer: 'Lord Jesus, help me to make God's dream more real wherever life places me.'

CHAPTER 6



EXPLORING OUR FRIEND'S ADDRESS BOOK



A few years ago I visited Tampa, Florida, in my first time. I had been asked to preach at the Holy Methodist Church and arrived there just as a hurry up off the coastline. A couple from the church airport, settled me in my hotel room and then I had supper. We had a wonderful evening getting to know each other over some delicious Cuban cuisine. Around 10 o'clock I went back to the hotel in pouring rain with almost no clothes. My adventure was about to begin.

After they dropped me off, I went up to the third floor to my room. When I put my security key-card in the door it would not open. Then I heard the sounds of a door coming from inside my room. Thinking I was being followed, I even harder to open the door. Still it would not come open. The thought came that maybe this was not my room. I went inside and would think that I was trying to rob them. I called the hotel security and have me arrested.

So I got back into the elevator, went down to the lobby and introduced myself to the receptionist and asked for my room. He got onto the computer, checked his records and said, 'Sir, we don't have you booked into this hotel!' I was shocked to do! Then it dawned on me that, in the poor visit to the hotel, I had dropped me off at the wrong hotel. I discovered

from the same franchise but in a different street. I needed to get the right address to find my hotel.

We need to be sure we always have the right address! During his time here on earth Jesus prepared his friends for life without his physical presence by telling them about some addresses where He would continue to meet them. These are scattered throughout the four gospels. I like to gather some of them together and call them 'Jesus' Address Book'. In effect Jesus was saying to them and to us, 'Explore these addresses. They are where you will find my risen and ascended presence. If you spend time in these places and with these people, our friendship together will be nourished and you will make God's dream a greater reality.'

Now we know from Scripture that the unpredictable God can surprise us in all things, in all places and in all situations. God is always right where we are, wherever we are, here and now. Christ, we know, is not only found in one place, but wherever life places us. His risen and ascended presence, as the writer to the Ephesians puts it, fills the entire universe. But there are some special gospel addresses where our Divine Friend promises to meet us. Although there are quite a few, I only want to explore three of them here.

THE FIRST GOSPEL ADDRESS - BREAD AND WINE

On the night before He died, Jesus had supper with his closest friends. Gospel writer Mark describes what happened.

While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take it; this is my body." Then He took a cup, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them and they all drank from it.²

Our Divine Friend can be found whenever and wherever his friends gather together to share in Communion. Indeed, in Holy Communion, Jesus Christ tells us He wants our friendship.

Think for a moment about all the things we celebrate when we eat the bread and drink the wine. We celebrate what God has done in Jesus, for it is his death and resurrection that give meaning to the elements. We celebrate the dream God has for our world when all will share in friendship with God and one another. We celebrate how the ordinary material things of life, like bread and wine, point beyond themselves to the presence of God in all things visible. Above all, we celebrate that our Divine Friend is alive and present with us, coming to us in the moment we receive the bread and wine,

For centuries, followers of Jesus have debated and argued about what actually happens in Communion. Does the bread and wine literally become his body and blood? Or are they symbols? Are they signs? What are we doing when we eat the bread and drink the wine? These are critical questions. What we believe about them can immensely affect how we celebrate the sacrament. But if we are not careful, we can also sometimes miss Jesus in all these heated discussions. Whatever we might believe about Communion, it is the meeting and being with the living Christ in the bread and wine that is essential. This mystery of faith goes way beyond our intellectual understanding.

Leslie Weatherhead tells of one of his Methodist friends who attended a Catholic church. After the service he asked one of the worshippers about what happened in the Mass. The worshipper, who was an old man, said something like this:

When I come to Mass, sir, I cannot always follow what they do at the altar. I just kneel down and think about Jesus. I think of his last week with his friends, and the Last Supper; how He knelt in agony in Gethsemane; how they arrested Him and all

might tortured Him, and how He died out of love for me. I get very near to Jesus, sir, and when I go home I know He comes with me.³

I think back over the years of the times I have sat with people who know they are dying. Often I simply ask, 'Is there anything I can do for you?' Sometimes they will just shake their head. Or they will ask me to pray. Or they will ask if they can confess something. But many times I have been asked to bring Holy Communion. They know from their past experience that this is a gospel address where they can share most intimately in the friendship of Christ. As they go on that lonely journey towards their death, it is not words so much they want to hear, it is the never-ending love of Christ in the bread and wine they want to taste on their parched lips.

A FRIENDSHIP EXERCISE

Whatever faith-tradition you stand in, or even if you are not part of one, remember a time when Communion became for you a gospel address where you met Jesus. What was it that made that time so special? Where did it happen? Was it in a church, or at home, or in hospital, or on a retreat or someplace else? How did you prepare yourself for this moment? How did you know that it was Jesus you were experiencing?

THE SECOND GOSPEL ADDRESS - WHERE TWO OR THREE GATHER TOGETHER

Has it ever struck you how much Jesus enjoyed actual human friendship? Think of those who were close to Him - the beloved disciple, the inner circle of three, the 12, the 70, Mary Magdalene,

the women at the cross, and the list continues. I have especially taken by his friendship with Mary and Mary Magdalene. When I read of their time together with brother Lazarus, I am touched by the depth of their friendship. Friendships certainly sustained Jesus during his life. So it comes as little surprise when He said to His disciples, 'For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.'

While I am aware that these words are often used to emphasize the importance of coming together in worship or in prayer, I believe they can also refer to the friendships we have with Jesus. When we open our lives to the friendship of Jesus, He brings his other friends with Him. There is no exclusive friendship with Jesus. It is never just me and Jesus, but Jesus and all His friends. Our friendship with Him is always personal and social. It also involves other people, especially those who are His friends. He has His arms around, to whom He introduces us.

When we reflect on Jesus' many friendships, they seem to operate at the same level of closeness. He clearly moves closer to some than to others. I think something similar is true with our friendships. There are those we may consider significant soul-friends. Unlike those who constantly drain us, to whom we only relate on a superficial level, these friendships sustain, nourish and grow our faith. They challenge and encourage us. Through them, Christ Himself makes His presence known. As such, they represent an important gift to which we need to go as often as we can.

Today real soul-friendship is quite rare. Some years ago, with a clinical psychologist friend, I led a men's retreat over the weekend we explored four areas of our lives. We explored our relationships with our fathers, our daily work, our life and our friendships. I will never forget a comment made by one of the retreatants, outwardly a successful and jovial bus

act of mercy done to someone who suffers is therefore also a direct kindness to Christ who dwells with them.

This is also why encounters with people in pain often change us. Almost every day I come into contact with the lives of those who are hurting and in pain. These daily encounters with the terminally ill, the retrenched, the economically poor, the divorced, the childless, the bereaved, the forgotten elderly and other suffering men and women have profoundly affected my understanding and experience of what it means to be a friend of Jesus. These relationships have been one of the most significant means the Spirit has used in the ongoing conversion of my heart and life.

Every act of mercy done to someone who suffers is therefore also a direct kindness to Christ who dwells with them.

I think of my relationship with Gavin who died recently. In my previous church community I was part of a ministry called Faith and Life that built friendships with mentally handicapped young people. For almost a year and a half, one Saturday afternoon a month, I would spend time with Gavin for about two hours. At first I didn't really know what to do when we were together. Because of his disabilities we couldn't have conversations, or play games, or read books or do any of the usual things one can with young people. Often I felt very awkward around Gavin and wished the time would go by quickly. My capacity to love him was severely impoverished.

However, Gavin's heart was much greater than mine. Whenever I arrived he would come across to meet me. Even though I often felt uncomfortable in his presence, he was at home in mine. In those moments when I wanted to give up on the friendship, his obvious delight in my company kept me coming back. But the most moving moment in our friendship happened one Sunday

night at worship. I was preaching and things were not going too well. Gavin was there that night, sitting about halfway down the aisle. In the midst of my preaching struggle, he got up, walked towards me and came and put his arm around my shoulder.

In that awkward holy moment I realised just how much Saturday afternoons with Gavin had become a gospel address where Christ wanted to meet me. Through our times together, the inner poverty of my loveless heart had been revealed. I had been challenged to face my lack of heartfelt compassion and tenderness. I discovered how easily dark feelings of irritability and impatience and indifference could surface within me, especially when I was not doing what I wanted to do. Acknowledging all this garbage in my heart was not easy but I knew it was necessary if I wanted the Holy Spirit to continue changing my heart of stone into a heart of flesh.

A FRIENDSHIP EXERCISE

Think of an encounter you have had with someone who could be considered 'one of the least of these'. How did it take place?

What feelings were evoked in you through your relationship with this person? How do you think Christ was meeting you here? Is there any way you could spend more time at this gospel address?

Another special privilege of my daily work is getting alongside those who have just begun a friendship with God. Often they will want to know how they can grow in this new friendship. The basics for me are always learning how to pray and getting to know Jesus in the gospels. As we have already seen, we never outgrow these two activities. Then I will always say to the person: 'Share regularly in the worship life of a community that celebrates communion. Find some soul-friends for the journey. Open your life and heart to those who suffer. If you go to these three gospel addresses, Christ will meet you there, and you will grow and grow and grow!'