



*You are my friends if you do what I command you.
John 15:14*

I have been thinking a lot lately about how I feel so very disconnected from all my friends. The impact of COVID-19 has not only cost us so many precious lives, cost us health and jobs, but has also cost us connection to our friends. I have a sense that prior to the pandemic many of us had wide social circles that included family members, close friends, colleagues and acquaintances, near and distant with frequent and occasional connections. Of course, since COVID-19 everything has changed in ways we don't even realize.

For example, most pastors I know want desperately to care for the people who are part of their faith communities. Yet so many pastors I talk to grieve that during these difficult days of meeting on social media platforms and worshipping via zoom they just can't keep up. Days and sometimes weeks pass by before we even realize that someone has "gone missing." I know that I and my pastor colleagues try our best to connect, but often find that a day has ended, and we still haven't reached out. Case in points, I have sent more belated birthday texts, emails and Facebook messages than ever before. Perhaps you feel the same and sense the tightening of your social circles. Try as you might you just can't keep up with all those you kept up with before. Maybe you feel more and more isolated from those you truly care about.

Feeling this sense of loss and its accompanying guilt, I read an article entitled, "Some Friendships Are Taking A 'Pandemic Pause' And That's All Right." (https://www.huffpost.com/entry/taking-a-friendship-break-covid-19_l_5f8f7693c5b62333b24005e7?ncid=newsltushpmsgnews). What I learned is that it is "okay" that your social circles are tightening. It doesn't mean that you care less, it just means that you and I have limited emotional energy to care for ourselves and others. We can't, after all, be all things to all people, and truth is we never really could be in the first place. This mean season doesn't mean we think of our friends any less. It doesn't mean we don't lift them in thoughts and prayers. It simply means that we have to allow ourselves this space.

Now we have a chance to be kind to ourselves and to know that there will be a time when we rediscover our connections to others. So, instead of feeling guilty about our lack of connections, perhaps we can feel hopeful that this space will give us perspective. We have this chance to remember that friendships are precious and holy. And when the time comes we can, more especially God can, resurrect our relationships and discover their warmth and joy again.

We can also remember that Jesus calls us friends, and that friendship does not wane. Moreover, Jesus has invited us to keep God's directive that we love expansively, generously and lovingly even when we don't have the energy to express our love as much and as often as we wish we could.

Holy One, come to us again. Remind us that we are your friends and you are ours, and that like our shared friendship with you, our friendships are resilient and can be rediscovered or even sustained through these difficult days. Amen.

