THE POWER OF LOVE - FRIENDSHIP STORY

Pastor Katy Reeves

There was once a father and son who were discussing the topic of friendship.

The father said, "You know, son, it's tough to make friends."

The son said, "What do you mean, Dad? I have lots of friends."

"How many friends do you have?" The father asked.

The son thought for a long while and said, "I've counted them up. I must have 200 friends!"

"200 friends!? A young man like you," said the father. "That's amazing! I can't believe it! "

"Why, Dad? How many friends do you have?"

"Me? My whole life I've worked really hard at it ,and I've only achieved half a friend."

"But Dad, everybody likes you! You're a wonderful man. What are you talking about-- only a half a friend? And what is a half a friend anyway?"

"Look son, you have to know whether your friends are really your friends. A friend in need is a friend in deed. Why don't you test it out and see if your friends are really friends?"

The father had an idea. "Here's what you do, son. A goat's blood resembles human blood. Take a goat and slaughter it and put it in a sack. Then at night, go to your friends and say, You've got to help me! I went to a bar last night and had a little too much to drink. There was a guy there who started insulting me and we got into an argument. He took a swing at me, I took a swing back at him, the fight rolled into the street, and I hit him a little too hard and killed him. Now I've got to get rid of the body. Will you help me?"

The son thought it was a great idea, and he tried it out. Night after night he took the sack of goat meat around to all his friends. It took him a couple of weeks and a few goats, but he got through all his friends. As you might guess, not one wanted anything to do with him. They understood that he wasn't responsible; that the other fellow started the fight, but they didn't want any part of it.

Finally, the son came back to his father and said, "Dad, I guess you're right. My friends aren't such good friends. How about your half friend? Maybe he'll help."

The father said, "Sure, try him out. Go to his house and tell him you're James' son. Tell him what happened, and see whether he will help you."

So, that night the son knocked on the friend's door.

"Who's there?"

"It's James son."

"Oh, James son! Come in. What can I do for you?"

The son told the story about the bar and the fight and the body.

"Well, really, I shouldn't help you, but what can I do? You're James' son."

He took the boy out in the backyard. They dug a hole and buried the sack.

"Now, go home. Stay out of the bars. If somebody insults you, just keep quiet. But most important, forget you ever knew me."

The son went back to his father and said, "Dad, why do you call him a half a friend? He's the only one who helped me!"

"What did he say to you?"

"He said really I shouldn't help you, but you're James' son. What can I do?"

"That's half a friend," said the father. "Somebody who pauses and says, 'Really, I shouldn't do this.' That's half a friend."

"Then Dad, what's a real friend?"

So his father told him another story:

Two young men had grown up together and become very close friends. They were living at a time when the Roman empire was split into two parts where one half was con trolled by an emperor in Rome and the other half ruled by an emperor in Syria. After each of the friends married, one moved to Rome and the other moved to Syria. Together they started an import/export business, and though they lived far apart, they remained very close friends.

One time, when the fellow from Rome was visiting Syria, someone accused him of being a spy for Rome and plotting against the emperor. He was an innocent man. It was just a vicious rumor. So they brought him to the Syrian emperor, and he was subsequently sentenced to death.

When he was being led out to his execution, he was asked if he had any last requests. The accused man pleaded, "Please I'm innocent, but I can't prove it. So, if I'm going to die, at least let me go back to Rome first, settle my affairs and say goodbye to my family. They don't know my business, like who owes me money, where all my goods are, etc. Let me just go back to Rome, put my affairs in order, and then I'll come back, a nd you can execute me."

The emperor laughed at him. "What! Do you think I'm crazy? You think we'd let you go? What possible guarantee will we have that you're going to come back?" The man said, "Wait, I have a friend here in Syria who will stand in for me. He'll be my guarantor. If I don't come back, you can kill him instead." The emperor was intrigued, "This I've got to see! Bring your friend."

The fellow from Syria was brought in. Sure enough, he agreed without hesitation to take his friend's place in prison, and to be killed in his stead if the friend did not return.

The emperor was so startled by this arrangement that he agreed to let the man go. I'll give you 60 days. Put your affairs in order. If you're not back by dawn of the 60th day, your friend is dead.

Off went the man back to Rome to put his affairs in order and say his goodbyes. After a lot of tears and goodbyes, he started back in plenty of time before the 60 days were up. As it happened, there was no wind for the sails and the boat trip was delayed.

By the time he arrived in Syria, dawn was breaking on the 60th day. As agreed, the jailers took out the friend for execution. Just as they were about to execute him, his friend came running in, "Wait! Stop! I'm back! Don't kill him! I'm the real prisoner!" The executioner let the fellow from Syria go and was about to take the Roman man in his place. "Wait a minute." the friend from Syria said, "You can't kill him. His time limit was up! I'm the guarantor. You've got to kill me instead!" The two friends were equally adamant, "Kill me instead!" "No, kill me!" The executioner didn't know what to do. The crowd was in an uproar, watching them fight it out.

Finally, the emperor stepped in. In wonder and amazement, he turned to the two of them and said, "I'll let you both go on one condition that you make me your third friend!"

That's friendship. That's unity.