

“Friending God”

**First Presbyterian Church
Pastor Dave Carlson
October 21, 2018**

Old Testament Lesson: Psalm 110:1-4

New Testament Lesson: Hebrews 7:23-28

Has anybody seen the new TV show God Friended Me? Does everyone know what being friended means? If not, it's something on Facebook. Does everyone know what Facebook is? If not, do you own a TV? Oh, good. Then we can continue.

Because God Friended Me is a new TV show, and in it, Facebook becomes the go-between for God and a guy named Miles Finer. Miles is an atheist trying to use his internet podcast to help people make changes for the better. I'm not explaining podcast to anyone (it's like radio). Miles plans to use his podcast to changing the world.

One day – you guessed it – God friends him on Facebook, trying to make a connection with Miles. Let's watch. Miles Finer gets a friend request from God and deletes it, not once but twice! Of course, Miles goes on to finally accept God's friend request, and he actually ends up helping people he meets through God on Facebook.

Now far be it from me to suggest that God can't help people through social media. But I'm pretty sure relying on social media as your primary channel to God is a big mistake. Miles Finer is an atheist, and yeah, sure, God can use even an atheist to make the world a better place. But there's only one person or channel that directly connects people to God, and that is Jesus Christ.

It may be that people actually get a sense of God through nature. It might be that following the teachings of Buddhism, Islam, Judaism or some other “ism” brings you in alignment with God's purpose and plan. But only Christianity connects you directly to God.

Only Jesus Christ is fully human and fully God. That is the point Hebrews is making, where it says, “... The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office; but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever.” In other words, earthly priests and pastors have their limitations – we are all flawed human beings, and only Jesus Christ is perfect.

Hebrews was written to build a bridge between Christianity and Judaism, and especially the 1st century Hebrews who were drawn to faith in Christ. The Hebrews followed the law of the Torah, the first five books of the Bible. Among them is the Book of Leviticus. Leviticus details the priestly system that Hebrews talks about. According to Leviticus, the high priest offers sacrifices to God in atonement for sins on behalf of the people.

But first, he had to offer a sacrifice for his own sins. After he arrives at the altar, the priest washes his hands and feet and clothes himself in gleaming white linen. Servants bring a bull that the priest himself has purchased. He places his hands on the animal's head, thereby transferring his sins. "O Lord God," he prays, "I have committed iniquity; I have transgressed; I have sinned, I and my house. O Lord, I beseech thee, cover over the sins and transgressions which I have committed, transgressed and sinned before thee, I and my house."

This was the practice that God ordained and established to teach the Hebrew people the humility and power of connecting with God through prayer. And this worked well, generation after generation, until that time when the priests began to use the power of their position for the betterment of their lives and their lives alone. They lost touch with their humility, their humanity.

So God sent a more perfect priest in the person of Jesus Christ, and God himself made the sacrifice for our sin, in the death and resurrection of Jesus. In Christ we are dead to sin and alive to God. That is our personal spiritual journey, our life's work, our best way of making the world a better place, by turning from sin and rejoicing in Christ.

Looking at our personal spiritual progress – and really all progress we hope to make – we tend to get frustrated with the slow pace. We pray to God to meet us in our needs, and then we wait. Sometimes the wait is brief and our prayers are answered. Sometimes we wait a lifetime. How that waiting period goes for you depends on who's in your corner alongside you. Too often, we put our hope in people and policies and systems that only serve to disappoint us.

Hebrews warns us about putting our hope in earthly things when it says, "For the law appoints as high priests those who are subject to weakness, but the word of the oath, which came later than the law, appoints a Son who has been made perfect forever."

In Jesus Christ, God overcomes our human weakness and replaces it with his own strength and his own holiness, and his vision of a better tomorrow. While our vision is limited, God sees the perfection of all creation, of all the universe, of all people, even the perfection of you. You are made perfect in God's eyes. God sees you and all the world only and forever through Christ. When what we see all around us is not that, not perfect, that is when God is most ready to work out God's plan through us, by us becoming open to God's leading, God's wisdom. That's where we turn amid this imperfect world of ours.

If you and your friends, you and your family, and you yourself are putting your hope in something other than God, then of course you'll be disappointed, misguided, frustrated, angry, sad, and lost.

Our schools, our government, our families, our workplaces and even our churches are all made up of flawed human beings just like you and me. So of course there will be struggles and suffering, of course things don't progress as well as they could.

But that is no reason to give up hope. Instead, we are called to shift our hope from that which is flawed to one who is perfect. Your hope is in Christ because it is Christ alone who connects us to God and leads us ever closer to that which God wants for us and for the world.

Only Jesus is able to meet us at every moment of our lives, unburden us of our past, and connect us to our future joy in the Lord. Only Jesus! And certainly not Facebook, or any other social media, our public institutions.

That TV show I talked about, God Friendened Me, it starts out in New York City, calling it, "... The center of the universe, home to 8.6 million people, a diverse Melting Pot of culture, everyone searching for meaning and answers." And the lead character continues, saying "I thought I had it all figured out, but then something happened and it changed my life forever." Then, God friendened him on Facebook.

That's TV, and this is real life. And real life is actually better than TV, because in real life God has friendened you and me – not through Facebook – but through the friend we have in Jesus.

The first episode of God Friendened Me ends with Miles Finer saying, "People say that God has a plan for all of us and we're all part of a grand design. Well," he says, "I never believed that to be true. But then he friendened me and it kind of turned my life upside down."

Friends, our lives have also been turned upside down, through our faith in Jesus Christ. If we're being true to our faith, if we're friendening God on a daily basis, it effects who our friends are, what we do with our money, and how we treat our family, friends and people we don't even know. It effects who we trust for healing and renewal and how we deal with loss, pain and suffering.

Because God friendened us through Jesus Christ, we know how to make the world a better place, and we know that it will be better, and we know that we will see it – a better world – if we continue to turn to Christ as our one and only channel to God and God's plan for our lives and for our world. Amen.

PASTORAL PRAYER

I pray for miracles in your health and finances.

I pray you find favor in times of your need.

I pray you have wisdom to make the right choices.

I pray you find courage to drop your bad habits.

I pray for true love from true friends, and true family.

I pray that your pains are turned into blessings.

I pray you are rewarded for faithfulness amid all your sufferings.

Lord we pray also for all those dealing with illness and disease and for their families,
Lord. For you promise to intercede on our behalf before our Heavenly Father, who protects
us, comforts us and cares for us as a parent, in the Spirit of love made perfect through you,
Jesus Christ, who taught us to pray saying:

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.**

**Thy kingdom come,
thy will be done,**

on earth as it is in heaven.

**Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors;
and lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil.**

For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.