

Mount Hollywood United Church of Christ – Los Angeles
Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost – September 13, 2015 – Homecoming Sunday
Communion Sunday
Rev. Anne G. Cohen, Minister

Wisdom of Solomon 7:26 - 8:1

REFLECTION

The Japanese have a term, *kenzoku*, which translated literally means "family." The connotation suggests a bond between people who've made a similar commitment and who possibly therefore share a similar destiny. It implies the presence of the deepest connection of friendship, of lives lived as comrades from the distant past.

Many of us have people in our lives with whom we feel the bond described by the word *kenzoku*. They may be family members, a mother, a brother, a daughter, a cousin. Or a friend from grammar school with whom we haven't talked in decades. Time and distance do nothing to diminish the bond we have with these kinds of friends.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/happiness-in-world/201312/the-true-meaning-friendship>

Do you have friends in your life whom you consider to be "*kenzoku*"?

Friends of G-d

In every generation [Wisdom] passes into holy souls and makes them friends of G-d... for G-d loves nothing so much as the person who lives with wisdom.

In every generation [Wisdom] passes into holy souls and makes them friends of G-d...

I find that to be one of the most beautiful statements ever written: Friends of G-d. It calls to mind the chosen name of a group of people ridiculed with the name "Quakers" (as they trembled in the presence of G-d) – the "Religious Society of Friends." This derived from the phrase "Friends of the Truth" – the truth coming straight from G-d – therefore Friends of G-d. It is a religious community that comes to decisions and finds truth in consensus – discussion, silence and reflection – repeated until the truth is discerned by all. It is a pacifist community, choosing life over death, peace over conflict, reconciliation over exclusion, consensus over democracy.

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This also calls to mind a group of people that gathers and worships in this room – you the living and all the Mt. Hollywood souls who have gathered over the last century. In many ways it is your friendship with one another that allows me to see your friendship

with G-d. It is a manifestation of *kenzoku*, a term I recently learned from an article in Psychology Today – in an article that attempts to describe the elements of authentic friendship.

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Do any of you have people in your lives whom you consider to be *kenzoku*?
What are the special qualities of that friendship?

The article continues:

The question...arises: why do we have the kind of chemistry encapsulated by the word *kenzoku* with only a few people we know and not scores of others? ... It may not in fact be possible to know, but **the characteristics that define a *kenzoku* relationship most certainly are.**

Listen to these characteristics – and tell me if they are central to friendship with G-d as well:

Common interests. [I like to think we share G-d's interests in the world – we like doing some of the same things.]

History. [Including] having gone through the same difficult experience. [This is where stories of hardship and G-d's presence with people come in.]

Common values. [Common values, I believe, also inform common interests.]

Equality. [This is where our theology of "Co-creation" comes in – where we are G-d's hands in the world.]

And then these things determine the worthiness of any friendship:

A commitment to your happiness. A true friend is consistently willing to put your happiness before your friendship...but a true friend won't refrain from telling you something you don't want to hear, something that may even risk fracturing

the friendship, if hearing it lies in your best interest. A true friend will not lack the mercy to correct you when you're wrong... [This reminds me of that phrase, "G-d love me the way I am and loves me enough to push me to be better."]

Not asking you to place the friendship before your principles. A true friend won't ask you to compromise your principles in the name of your friendship or anything else. Ever.

A good influence. A true friend inspires you to live up to your best potential...
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/happiness-in-world/201312/the-true-meaning-friendship>

Do you recognize any of these characteristics in your relationships here at church and/or your relationship with G-d? Some more than others?

Brené Brown, researcher and storyteller, in her TEDx talk "The Power of Vulnerability" finds that people who are "whole-hearted" – who believe they are worthy of love and relationships and can offer themselves whole-heartedly to others – these people are willing to be vulnerable and authentic, imperfect but genuine with others.

http://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability#t-1035166

And that makes all the difference in the world when it comes to creating and maintaining connections – finding *kenzoku*, being part of a meaningful and supportive community or village or family.

Of course it takes discernment and wisdom to protect oneself from those who would take advantage of one's vulnerabilities. It is necessary to take time to determine who is worthy of friendship. And that goes for our understanding of G-d as well. If G-d was constantly focused on my brokenness, judging me, shunning me, making me feel unworthy to be human, I'd reject that relationship and that understanding of G-d.

The G-d I wrestle with loves me as I am (broken and imperfect) and pushes me to be better (healed and reconciled – still not perfect). The G-d who is my partner in life is by my side as I raise my son, care for my parents, maintain my marriage – AND attempt to make the world a better, safer, more just environment for all – especially the vulnerable. The G-d I am friends with has been there with me in hard times, plays with me in good times, shares my values and brings people into my life who also share my values.

As we begin another year together, let's remember that:

*In every generation [Wisdom] passes into holy souls and makes them friends of G-d...
for G-d loves nothing so much as the person who lives with wisdom.*

Welcome home.

Scripture Reading for Sunday September 13, 2015 – Pentecost 16

Wisdom of Solomon 7:26 - 8:1

7:26 For she is a reflection of eternal light, a spotless mirror of the working of God, and an image of his goodness. 27 Although she is but one, she can do all things, and while remaining in herself, she renews all things; **in every generation she passes into holy souls and makes them friends of God**, and prophets; 28 for God loves nothing so much as the person who lives with wisdom. 29 She is more beautiful than the sun, and excels every constellation of the stars. Compared with the light she is found to be superior, 30 for it is succeeded by the night, but against wisdom evil does not prevail.

8:1 She reaches mightily from one end of the earth to the other, and she orders all things well.

Alex Lickerman M.D.

The True Meaning of Friendship

Posted Dec 15, 2013

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/happiness-in-world/201312/the-true-meaning-friendship>

The Japanese have a term, *kenzoku*, which translated literally means "family." The connotation suggests a bond between people who've made a similar commitment and who possibly therefore share a similar destiny. It implies the presence of the deepest connection of friendship, of lives lived as comrades from the distant past.

Many of us have people in our lives with whom we feel the bond described by the word *kenzoku*. They may be family members, a mother, a brother, a daughter, a cousin. Or a friend from grammar school with whom we haven't talked in decades. Time and distance do nothing to diminish the bond we have with these kinds of friends.

The question then arises: why do we have the kind of chemistry encapsulated by the word *kenzoku* with only a few people we know and not scores of others? The closer we look for the answer the more elusive it becomes. It may not in fact be possible to know, but the characteristics that define a *kenzoku* relationship most certainly are.

WHAT DRAWS PEOPLE TOGETHER AS FRIENDS?

Common interests. This probably ties us closer to our friends than many would like to admit. When our interests diverge and we can find nothing to enjoy jointly, time spent together tends to rapidly diminish. Not that we can't still care deeply about friends with whom we no longer share common interests, but it's probably uncommon for such friends to interact on a regular basis.

History. Nothing ties people together, even people with little in common, than having gone through the same difficult experience. As the sole glue to keep friendships whole in the long run, however, it often dries, cracks, and ultimately fails.

Common values. Though not necessarily enough to create a friendship, if values are too divergent, it's difficult for a friendship to thrive.

Equality. If one friend needs the support of the other on a consistent basis such that the person depended upon receives no benefit other than the opportunity to support and encourage, while the relationship may be significant and valuable, it can't be said to define a true friendship.

WHAT MAKES A FRIEND WORTHY OF THE NAME?

A commitment to your happiness. A true friend is consistently willing to put your happiness before your friendship. It's said that "good advice grates on the ear," but a true friend won't refrain from telling you something you don't want to hear, something that may even risk fracturing the friendship, if hearing it lies in your best interest. A true friend will not lack the mercy to correct you when you're wrong. A true friend will confront you with your drinking problem as quickly as inform you about a malignant-looking skin lesion on your back that you can't see yourself.

Not asking you to place the friendship before your principles. A true friend won't ask you to compromise your principles in the name of your friendship or anything else. Ever.

A good influence. A true friend inspires you to live up to your best potential, not to indulge your basest drives.

Of course, we may have friends who fit all these criteria and still don't quite feel *kenzoku*. There still seems to be an extra factor, an attraction similar to that which draws people together romantically, that cements friends together irrevocably, often immediately, for no reason either person can identify. But when you find these people, these *kenzoku*, they're like priceless gems. They're like finding home.

HOW TO ATTRACT TRUE FRIENDS

This one is easy, at least on paper: become a true friend yourself. One of my favorite quotations comes from Gandhi: "Be the change you wish to see in the world." Be the friend you want to have. We all tend to attract people into our lives whose character mirrors our own. You don't have to make yourself into what you think others would find attractive. No matter what your areas of interest, others share them somewhere. Simply make yourself a big target. Join social clubs organized around activities you enjoy. Leverage the Internet to find people of like mind. Take action.

As I thought about it, there are four people in my life I consider *kenzoku*. How many do you?

Dr. Lickerman's book, [The Undefeated Mind: On the Science of Constructing an Indestructible Self](#), is available now. Please read the sample chapter ([link is external](#)) and visit Amazon ([link is external](#)) or Barnes & Noble ([link is external](#)) to order your copy today.