

8th October 2024

Friendship

**"The faithful friend is a secure refuge;
whoever has found one has found a treasure.**

A faithful friend is beyond all price.

A faithful friend is a life-saving remedy."

Ecclesiasticus, Chapter 6:14-17

The Book of Ecclesiasticus is a book of the Apocrypha written in Hebrew, about ethical teachings and life guidance, from approximately 200BC, believed to have been composed by Ben Sira of Jerusalem. This collection of maxims, proverbs, instructions and principles, along with a number of other books in the Apocrypha – such as Tobit, Judith, 1 and 2 Maccabees, Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach and Baruch – is included by a number of Churches as part of their Old Testament literature.

The apocryphal books are worth reading, if for no other reason than they offer us new insights into familiar principles. The quotation above is a good example, for in the beauty of its language and imagery, it offers us a refreshing exploration of things we all know well – such as the value and importance of friendship.

Which of us doesn't know the safe refuge a good friend offers in times of trouble? Not just a "place" of refuge – important enough of itself – but an attitude, a metaphysical embrace, providing us with security and safety. And isn't friendship a treasure, whether that friendship is life-long or relatively recent, with a value that's priceless? And what about a "life-saving remedy", a healing moment, reflective conversation, new insight, patient silence? Thinking of your friends, don't such images abound?

If all you do today is to reflect on the quote above, that'll be enough. But these words from Henri Nouwen, from his 1996 book, *Out of Solitude*, might just help you a little further.

When we honestly ask ourselves which person in our lives means the most to us, we often find that it is those who, instead of giving much advice, solutions, or cures, have chosen rather to share our pain and touch our wounds with a gentle and tender hand. The friend who can be silent with us in a moment of despair or confusion, who can stay with us in an hour of grief and bereavement, who can tolerate not knowing, not curing, not healing, and face with us the reality of our powerlessness, that is a friend who cares.

A prayer for today

"What a friend I have in ..." So now, complete the sentence – and give thanks.