



Dear Friends,

While there are many, one of my favorite thought-provoking passages of scripture comes from John 16, when Jesus says, “No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends.” While friendship seems to be one of the most underrated and misunderstood relationships of modern life, Jesus holds it in great esteem. But, while church is one of the few places where we go to build relationships today, we don’t talk all that much about friendship. So that’s what we’re going to do this summer.

Starting Sunday July 21, we’re embarking on a six-week sermon series, ***Friendship: No Greater Love Than This***, where we’ll discuss the necessity of friendship, the marks of friendship, how to cultivate friendship, and what to do when a friendship isn’t going well. This is important because just like in that early community of Christ followers, friendship is still the foundation of the church. (If you didn’t have friends here, you wouldn’t go here!)

As we delve more deeply into friendship, we’ll also be considering another Christ-inspired relationship, that of our neighbor. This Sunday (7/21) after worship, I invite you to join me in the Conference Room for practical training on how to be a good neighbor for those on our property who are struggling with addiction, homelessness, and their mental health.

Relationship is all about how we walk alongside one another, and how we support one another. For the next two weeks, I’ll be supporting our church staff by letting them take some much-needed rest. During that period, I’ll need your support to hold our congregation as we move through summer with a staff in transition and neighbors with many needs. If you have a few free hours to pitch in, send me a note ([abilton@firstchurchburlington.org](mailto:abilton@firstchurchburlington.org))! I would love your help.

The Gospel ideas that the greatest commandment is to love God and love our neighbor as ourselves, and that there is no greater love than to lay one’s life down for a friend are deeply connected. Whether it’s love of God, neighbor, or friend, it’s all about relationship, and the trajectory of all these relationships is one of love.

See you in church!

In Faith,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ava".

[Ava Bilton](#), Director of Congregational Life