

Lean On Me

Sermon by Rachel Lopez and Emily Van Cise
June 22, 2008

Lean on me, when you're not strong
And I'll be your friend
I'll help you carry on
For it won't be long
Till I'm gonna need
Somebody to lean on

These words from Bill Withers gave us a positive perspective about what it means to be a friend. Friendship is a give and take kind of relationship where sometimes you are the one giving the help and other times you are the one asking for help. Without expectations, judgment, or words of discouragement, any calls for help should always be answered. Whether it's good times or bad, simple or difficult a true friend will be there for you during it all. We believe the most important attribute of people is the ability to make friends as well as the ability to be a friend.

Sometimes in our lives we have pain
We all have sorrow
But if we are wise
We know that there's always tomorrow

As we've grown up in this church and this community we have witnessed suffering but we have also witnessed joy. And we have learned that through all the pain and anguish of ourselves and those around us, happiness and light is just around the corner. We believe that this congregation strives to cherish and love each other and to teach our children that tomorrow is always a fresh start.

We have all had our individual struggles and misfortunes but together with the members of this church we have been able to see that in desperate times people really can come together. For every struggle we have also experienced joyous celebrations and gatherings of love. We know that it's equally important to be together in times of good cheer as the times of sadness, and we have leaned on the church many times because life has a lot of both.

It is the times of misfortune that we see the people that we can truly count on to be there for us. Some of the best friends that we have made have been through the worst of times. It has been our friends who have helped us when we are going through trials, without giving us their opinions or advice; they are just there to lend a helping hand and a shoulder to cry on. And knowing that someone is there for you during the hardest times is the solid foundation of somebody that can be there for you in the best of times.

Of course, friends are not only there for you when the going gets tough. They are also there for a laugh, or a party, or a sock hop. They laugh at your jokes and know just how to make you smile. As we thought about good times with our friends at the church we remembered all of our overnights, where we stayed up all night watching movies or blowing up candy Nerds in the microwave. Midnight walks to the Rose Bowl and swinging on swings gave us a good opportunity to bond. Through these times we have witnessed true friendship at its best.

Please swallow your pride
If I have things you need to borrow
For no one can fill those of your needs
That you don't let show

A good sidekick knows what you are feeling without you having to say anything; at a single glance, sometimes even before you know. They will always be there whether you want a cup of sugar or need a place to stay. To a friend, struggles or accomplishments are neither too big nor too small, and even if they

will never be able to understand, they will remain by your side. Even if you get upset at silly little things like when your team didn't win the World Series, or when you're afraid to jump in the deep end or when the boy you like doesn't call. A pal won't poke fun, and if they do, it is with the best intentions and without feelings of belittlement.

Sometimes asking for help is hard but you should never be afraid to ask your friends for help. We get embarrassed and ashamed by our problems and we feel like no will understand or they will think less of us. It is easy to feel that a companion will not care about your problems or will mock you for feeling how you do. It can be hard to trust the people closest to you with certain aspects of your life. Trust should be earned but how can they earn it if you never let them in? A confidant keeps a respectful distance but intervenes without judgment when they see that you are struggling and in need of a safe place.

If there is a load you have to bear
That you can't carry
I'm right up the road
I'll share the load
If you just call me

Sometimes you have such good friends that they become part of you. You develop a different kind of bond than that of parents or siblings, but an important one all the same. There are things that only a friend can understand and parts of you that only they can see. Your pain becomes their pain and your accomplishments are celebrated as if they are their own. You can be so close that with just one look you know exactly what they are thinking, enough to finish each other's sentence.

As we were writing we realized how many connections we have made within this community. Neighborhood Church has provided us with our closest friends. Throughout the years you have seen us grow, not so much physically but emotionally and spiritually. Many adults of this congregation have become close friends and a strong support system. Through thick and thin our advisors and our teachers have had a greater impact on our lives than they realize. They have helped us grow and guided us but always let us take the lead. Following our first Unitarian principle, the inherent worth and dignity of every person, they always treated us with respect and allowed us to become the people we were meant to become. What began as a teacher student relationship has become that of equals.

Friendships were also formed with our peers. We have shared the same experiences and many of us have been through the church's religious education programs such as OWL and Rites of Passage. The friends that we have gained from these programs are friends that have always and will always be here. The connections we've made are so strong that they have impacted our lives outside of church. People that we once only saw on Sundays are now people we see all the time. Last week in the Senior High's circling out ceremony we saw just how big of an impact we have had on each other over the years. Through laughter and through tears the bond we have as youth, and a greater church community, is like the bond of a family.

Friendship is the hardest thing in the world to explain. We know this because we sat in the library for hours trying to figure it out. It may not be the same for everybody. For some, it means having someone listen to them cry on the phone, for others its laughing at jokes that no one else thinks are funny, or wearing silly dresses just to be different. They love you for who you are and wouldn't want you any other way and we as friends have seen the best and worst of each other. Words don't always work to explain things and sometimes the things most important to us have no words.