“Sweet Dreams are Made of This.” Biggest hit by Annie Lennox and Dave Thomas, known together as The Eurythmics. Written and recorded I 1983, after the breakup of their romantic relationship. Too bad for them, lucky for us, as it is a driving, haunting rock song.

It makes the first line in today’s sermon because of the words in the “pre-chorus:” Everybody’s lookin’ for something/Some of them want to use you/Some of them want to be used by you/Some of them want to abuse you/Some of them want to be abused.

You can kinda see the bitterness at the end of romance in those words, can’t you? You may answer yes or no to that, but you might be wondering how this is all making its way into a sermon on love.

William Loader—Bill, my Australian professor friend who doesn’t even know I exist—is tangentially responsible for that. In his commentary on today’s passage from John he writes that it abandons the familiar “imagery of servitude in favour of friendship. While the language of serving and servitude has dominated Christian tradition, this little correction deserves more reflection. Could we say: God does not want slaves; God wants companions? It creates a different model of spirituality. Of course friendship also means letting the other be and acknowledging that otherness in its integrity and sacredness. Certainly there is no thought of ‘pocketing’ God or Jesus in a way which reduces either - a kind of power-play which makes them manageable (pocket-able and in my control). Some people either want to dominate or be dominated.”

A ha! And *there’s* my excuse for the Annie Lennox reference.

If we think about it, we will see it in others (maybe, in a moment of lucidity, in ourselves)—that tendency to want God to do everything for us, including those things which (admittedly, by God’s grace) we can do for ourselves. Even more pointedly, it’s sometimes a matter of wanting God to make decisions for us instead of inspiring us to make the best decisions we can. In other words, for God to dominate us.

I’m not suggesting, nor do I think Loader is, that this places us on a par with God. Not at all. But I do think we’re meant to take seriously Jesus’ having said, “I do not call you servants any longer, . . . but I have called you friends.”

Here’s the rest of Loader’s paragraph on the subject: “The model here is different. It does not compromise the integrity or holiness of the other, but affirms companionship in such holiness.”

The readings today are full of commands and obedience and all the rest of it that I despaired of making anything positive out of it, frankly. The problem is not scripture, of course, but me. Once I saw a string of things implying to me that *if* we do this, or *if* we avoid that, God will love us, and we will be in God’s love.

If you want specifics, here’s a line from the First Letter of John: “By *this* we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and obey his commandments.” This rebellious streak in me began to protest, wondering how that was different from insisting that by following this law and that commandment, we will earn God’s love.

Then “This is my commandment [from the gospel], that you love one another.” Oh boy, I thought, that makes people love each other, all right, someone saying, “Love him! Love her! If you don’t, you won’t have followed my commandment, and you won’t abide in my love.”

I confess, as I have before, my contrariness in this matter. Sometimes it seems I’m just looking for trouble. I went to bed last night despairing of finding something I could say with a shred of integrity about the propers. When I got up (eeaarrllyy), I set off searching through old sermons, I thing I do sometimes in desperation. Nada. Nothing there to help me.

Then I poked around, looking for help among my friends (who, once again, are unaware of my presence). This line about friendship versus servitude moved me out of the rut I’d dug for myself.

Whether we like it or not, we’re often drawn to people who oppose the same things as ourselves. So Loader caught my attention by writing about people who want to pocket Jesus or God, as if they’d gotten it right and could use their knowledge to condemn or reject others.

Here he is again: “The language of intimacy returns with the notion of being chosen. It should probably be seen more as . . . language in which love expresses awe and gratitude than as . . . an . . . analysis which is bent on proving some are chosen and some are rejected, though it easily forms such a solid mass in situations of conflict. . . . The focus here is more on why the disciples are in this special relationship: to bear fruit (15:16). With this the writer brings us back to the image of the vine and returns to the intimacy which assures that we are listened to and loved. We will be heard when we ask (15:16). We ask no more, no less than fulfilment of the relationship in love.”

Before leaving these propers, a word about the allusion to “water and blood” in the Epistle. It refers to the full humanity of Jesus Christ, an answer to the budding heresy of Docetism, that Jesus was fully divine but only seemed to be human. Here’s something I learned, or re-learned, from Bill Loader this morning. The name of that heresy comes not from the name of some early proponent of the heresy but from the Greek word “dokeo” which means, “I seem.” It’s pertinent in this context, because it is further proof that Jesus, a full-blooded (pun intended) human being, came to embody not only God’s presence and love among us, but also to call us into companionship, friendship with the all-powerful divine. It is a radical move on God’s part, to be sure, and it overturns the notion of our being used or abused by God, or our trying to use God as a tool or weapon against other people. Only God can change people, and it is our joy to be invited into friendship with that same loving and generous God. + + +