

Multiplying Love 2024 Lenten Study

The Opportunity Before Us

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Scripture Text: Colossians 3:11-15; John 13:34-35; Romans 12:9-21

What are you known for? When people describe you or talk about you and your skills, what do they say? What are you known for? Is it a specific recipe, that you make at a special occasion? Are you known as a good musician? A savvy business mind? An ideas person? A dreamer? An entrepreneur or as someone who is generous? Did you invent something? Do you have a patent? Maybe you have are a local legend? A sports star? Are you known as a writer or teacher a soldier or a parent? Are you known for your work or for your personality? Are you the life of the party? A steady presence that people rely on? What are you known for?

In John's gospel, on Jesus' last night with his disciples as they are celebrating the Passover together, Jesus does something unexpected. That is part of what Jesus is known for: doing the unexpected, calling regular, marginally educated folks to be his disciples, associating with sinners everywhere he goes, turning over tables, feeding thousands with five loaves and two fish, raising dead to life, healing—Jesus is known for the unexpected. That night at the Last Supper, the unexpected act was Jesus, taking the form of a servant, and washing the feet of his disciples. After he had washed their feet, he asks them, "Do you understand what I have done?" I have set the example of how you are to be to and for one another."

In this act, he is showing humility, servant leadership, and love. Then later that same night, after he predicts his betrayal and Judas leaves to do just that, Jesus tells the remaining disciples: "I give you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, so you also must love each other. This is how everyone will know that you are my disciples, when you love each other."

Jesus says that his disciples will be known by how they love. Known by love. What are you known for?

It seems that sometimes, we as the church have lost our identity of love; at least as we are seen by the rest of the world. We know the research shows that those inside the church believe that they are loving and welcoming, but that is not how those outside the church view church folks. This has been true for a while and was recently confirmed again in a 2022 study by Ipsos entitled Jesus in America. "The research

suggests that nonbelievers think Christians are hypocritical, judgmental, self-righteous, and arrogant. Christians, in stark contrast, think of themselves as compassionate and loving.”

Friends, we have work to do. Jesus calls us to be known by our love, and as a whole, we are not. We are not known by our love, especially by nonbelievers who are the very folks that we want reach with the love of Jesus. We have lost our way, and we have an opportunity. We have an opportunity, to double down on love. To embrace wholeheartedly—body, mind, spirit, life—what it means and looks like to live in love of God and love of others. We need to focus in on being known by love so that in our own lives and in the life of each congregation, what can be said of us is: They love. They know Jesus; they love.

What does that look like? What does it look like to be known by love? Scripture gives us a lot of examples. Love is a primary thread that weaves throughout all of scripture; God is love; Jesus provides a living example of love, and the apostles write about love. Author Paul Chilcote, begins this chapter with Colossians 3: “Therefore, as God’s choice, holy and loved, put on compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Be tolerant with each other and, if someone has a complaint against anyone forgive each other. As the Lord forgave you, so also forgive each other.”

What does it look like to be known by love? It looks like compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, patience, and forgiveness.

In Romans 12, love looks like outward care, holding on to what’s good, showing honor, being enthusiastic, serving the Lord, joyful, patient, prayerful, generous, welcoming strangers, blessing people, being genuine with people no matter what they are feeling, treating others as equals, not thinking we are better than anyone else, showing respect, living at peace with everyone.

What is your congregation known for? What are you known for?

Friends, Jesus’ teaching is clear. Disciples of Jesus will be known by how they love. Scripture gives us tons of examples of what that looks like and how we can live that out in our families, churches, communities, and world. As disciples of Jesus, your homework, for the rest of your days, is to live so that you would be known for your love. My prayer for you and your church is that you live love in such a way, that love becomes your identity. May you be known by your love. Amen.