

Known By Love John 13

Today is Valentine's Day and with everything going on in our world, especially the division, I thought it would be good for us to spend some time focusing on the importance of love. The kind of love we think about on Valentine's Day is usually romantic love between a man and a woman, but if you look at where Valentine's Day comes from, you see a different kind of love as well. Valentine's Day is linked to the legend of a priest named Valentine. (Picture) In an article on Inspiration.org, Dr. Craig von Buseck writes this:

It is believed that Valentine was a priest serving Rome under Emperor Claudius II. At that time, Rome was embroiled in many costly and unpopular military campaigns. As a result, the emperor was finding it difficult to recruit soldiers to maintain and replenish his armies. Claudius came to believe that Roman men were unwilling to join the army because of affection for and obligations to their wives and families.

To overcome this obstacle, Claudius banned all marriages and engagements in Rome.

As a Christian leader, Valentine knew the edict flew in the face of biblical teaching and doctrine regarding the sanctity of marriage and of the family. Recognizing the injustice of the decree, he defied the emperor and continued to secretly perform marriages for young lovers.

The church thought that marriage was very sacred between one man and one woman for their life and that it was to be encouraged. The idea of encouraging them to marry within the Christian church was what Valentine was about. And he secretly married them because of the edict.

Valentine was arrested by Claudius and placed into the custody of an aristocrat named Asterius. As the story goes, Asterius made the mistake of letting the preacher talk. Father Valentine went on and on about Christ leading pagans out of the shadow of darkness and into the light of truth and salvation. Asterius made a bargain with Valentine: If the Christian could cure his foster-daughter of blindness, he would convert. Valentine put his hands over the girl's eyes and chanted: 'Lord Jesus Christ, enlighten your handmaid, because you are God, the True Light.'

According to the legend, a miracle took place and the child could see. As a result, Asterius and his whole family were baptized. Unfortunately, when the Emperor heard the news, he ordered them all to be executed.

The last words Valentine wrote were found in a note to Asterius' daughter – signing it, "from your Valentine."

So according to legend, Valentine was dedicated to encouraging Christian romance and marriage, but he was also dedicated to Christian service – he served the people around him to the point that it eventually cost him his life. And that's the aspect of love I want us to focus on this morning because that kind of love is central to who Jesus was and who we are to be as Christians. And that kind of love is something I think is largely lacking and needed right now among Christians and churches.

We have experienced a lot of turmoil this past year that has brought a lot of fear and tension. As we all know, Christians have different opinions about volatile things related to the pandemic, politics, and elections and many of us have ended up backing into our corners to defend our positions and resist any who disagree – even fellow believers. It's brought division within families, communities and churches – division that grieves the heart of God, and sometimes I think Christians don't know what else to do. We think it's the right thing to defend and resist and we're convinced our perspective is right and we have to fight for it.

This morning I want to urge us to break out of our corners and follow a path forward that will be far closer to the heart of who Jesus was and what he wants us to do. Jesus showed his disciples how he wanted them to move forward as he reached the completion of his training with them and I believe he wants the same for us today. On his last night with them before he was crucified, he met with his disciples in the upper room of a house in Jerusalem and used it as a vital teaching opportunity. John was there and he records the story in John 13.

Read John 13:1-5.

Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. (and now John describes how Jesus did that. So this is how Jesus loved them...) ² During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, ³ Jesus, knowing that

the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, ⁴ *rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist.* ⁵ *Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.*

According to John, this was how Jesus *“loved them to the end.”* He loved them by washing their feet. In Gill’s Exposition of the Bible he notes: *“This custom of washing the feet was not used by the Jews at their Passover, nor at their private entertainments, or common meals...”* In other words, it wasn’t normal for someone to be washing people’s feet in that situation. Gill says that this custom was used *“at the reception of strangers or travelers, which were just come off of a journey, whereby they had contracted dirt and filth, and was a servile work, never performed by superiors to their inferiors, but by inferiors to superiors; as by the servant to his master; and was an instance of great humility.”*

So when Jesus bent down to wash his disciples’ feet that evening, it was a very abnormal thing for him to do. They weren’t expecting a foot-washing, and they certainly weren’t expecting that it would come from their Master and Teacher. If anybody should be washing anyone’s feet, it should have been them washing Jesus’ feet. Peter was really thrown off by it, so when it came his turn, he told Jesus: *“You shall never wash my feet!”* But Jesus insisted saying, *“What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand.”*

Why did Jesus do something so strange? Why act like a servant? He went from one disciple to the next, so that each of them had the experience of him washing their feet. He had their attention, and after drying the last disciple’s feet, he explained what he was doing.

Read John 13:12-17.

¹² *When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, “Do you understand what I have done to you?”* ¹³ *You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am.* ¹⁴ *If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.* ¹⁵ *For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.* ¹⁶ *Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a*

messenger greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.

Jesus washed their feet that night because he wanted to give them an example to follow that they'd never forget – an example of how he wanted them to treat one another. Jesus wanted them to wash one another's feet – to take on the form of a servant, to lower themselves before one another and willingly serve each other. That's the kind of love that characterized his life and if they were going to be his followers, that's the kind of love they would have to show to one another.

They too would face a lot of turmoil in their world as they felt opposition rise up against them from the religious leaders and worried about what their government would do. I'm sure they had strong personal opinions about what was happening and that they probably had disagreements with one another. How could Jesus prepare them to face that kind of tension? What should be their posture toward each other in the midst of it? Should they back into their corners and defend their opinions and resist any who didn't agree?

No. Actually, they should get down on their hands and knees and wash one another's feet. That's a whole lot different, and that's what Jesus wanted them to do. If they didn't learn how to love and serve one another, the church would be destroyed. So as he prepared them for what was ahead he taught them to wash one another's feet. He finished in verses 34-35...

Read John 13:34-35.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Love one another like I have loved you... Wash one another's feet. Serve one another. The thing that people should notice about you is your love for one another, not your arguing; not your differences. Love is how they will know you're my disciples and belong to me.

Hopefully I don't have to say a lot more here this morning. The characteristic that should define us as Christians is the love we have for one another. When people hear about us, they should think, "those people really love one another." They

should think about ways we've shown kindness and helped and served one another. We should have a reputation of love. So is that what they're thinking about you? If not, there's the path forward. That's what Jesus wants you to do. Rather than backing into a corner to defend your positions when you're with family or at work or at church or on Facebook, Jesus wants you to lean forward, get down on your knees and serve. Humble yourself and show kindness. That's what Jesus would do. Washing feet was only the beginning. The next day he willingly allowed himself to be stripped, flogged, and ridiculed. And then they nailed him to the cross. He served us by laying down his life for us, and he wants us to serve and love one another to glorify him.

How can you love the people around you today? I'm guessing you won't be washing anyone's feet, but maybe you could give them a phone call to check up on them. Maybe you could stop by and pay them a visit. If someone's been irritating to you and you feel some resentment toward them, maybe you could walk over and ask them how they're doing. Bring over a plate of cookies or a loaf of bread. Ask if you could make them supper.

We've spent a lot of time in the past year focusing on a whole bunch of things that bring negativity and division. We need to stop going down that road and try another direction instead. Try spreading the love of Christ. Let them know we are Christians by our love.

Read 1 Corinthians 13.

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

⁴ Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. ⁷ Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things...

¹³ So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.