

40 Days of Love - Day 8

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” (John 13:34).

Context is crucial when we read scripture.

The classic example is the man who claims that the Bible states, “there is no God,” and it’s true, you can find those very words in scripture, but what’s the context? The full passage reads “The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” (Psalm 14:1a) Knowing the whole passage kind of changes things doesn’t it?

It’s easy (and reckless) to cherry pick scriptures so that they say what we want them to say instead of what God intended them to say. The passage we look at today seems harmless enough on the surface. Jesus embodied the love of God and came to teach us to love the same way, but what’s the context?

Where was Jesus when he spoke these words?

He was sharing a final meal with those closest to him before he would be condemned to die a cruel death by crucifixion, and as he looked around the table he looked into their eyes and he already knew. He already knew Judas would betray him. He already knew Peter would deny him. He already knew the other disciples would scatter and go into hiding. He already knew.

The context of the meal tells us that love is something offered even if you “already know” that it may not be reciprocated in the same way.

Love is not a bartered negotiation where the one that extends love says, “I’ll love you if you _____” and then you fill in the blank.

“I’ll love you if you love me back.”

“I’ll love you if you don’t disappoint me.”

“I’ll love you if you love me first.”

No, Jesus said, “I’ll love you” and left it at that.

No strings.

No conditions.

Just an offer.

Love someone this week.

Even if you “already know.”

See you Sunday,

Minister of Contemporary Worship and Arts, Joel Lanier

40 Days of Love - Day 9

As we get started today, let me ask you a question. In what ways do you identify with other people? Maybe it's as simple as being from another family, going to a different church, or maybe even, dare I say, cheering for another school or team. But what if we took it a step further and think about how we identify others who come from different religions, or possibly have different political views, or maybe even have a different view of same sex marriages and relationships. **I believe it can be said that we treat other people based upon how we identify them.** If you are around others that are like-minded and you can identify with them, we naturally tend to treat them with more dignity and respect. But it can also be said that we treat others who we do not identify with differently and with less dignity and respect. Now most of us would not come out and say this, but through our posts on social media, our likes, and sometimes even our actions, we find this to be true.

Galatians 6:9 says, "Let us not grow weary of doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up." I believe many times, we have great intentions on loving everyone, but it is so easy to lose sight of that. Scripture is full of verses, as we will see over these 40 days, about love and who to love.

John 3:16, "For God so loved the World (everyone)!"

Ephesians 4:32, "Be kind, one to another!"

Luke 6:31, "Do unto others as you would like to be treated!"

1 John 4:20, "Whoever says he loves God but hates his brother is a liar!"

Not one time in these verses does it say love this person but not this person. May we always remember that the only way we are ever able to love others (both those we identify with and those we don't) is because God first loved us! It is because of His love through sending Jesus Christ that we are able to love others, but also should love others. This doesn't mean its going to be easy, and for many of us, this idea will mean some changes in our lives. *John 13:35 says, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."* So how do we do this? We love them with **Grace** and **Truth** just like Jesus did! We love them with **Grace** by loving them right where they are, and we love them with **Truth** by caring enough to show them the hope we have in Christ Jesus.

Is there someone you don't feel like loving, but you should?

I pray as you go through today that you will allow God's love to transfer into your love for both those you identify with and those who you don't, and that you love them the way Jesus loves us, with **Grace** and **Truth**!

See you Sunday,

Minister of Students, Scott Maxwell

40 Days of Love - Day 10

“There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love” (1 John 4: 18).

Old and new. No matter your age, there are always things in our lives that are old and new. To my daughters, some of their toys they got for Christmas are already starting to become old! To me, my perfectly fine vehicle is looking pretty old! In both of those examples, our attitudes are the driving force. Think about some of your relationships. Are there some relationships in your life that could be described as “old”? Driven by rules and habits?

Since it's Valentine's Day, now is a great opportunity to evaluate some relationships in your life that have become “old”. A couple stories come to mind that I believe are great examples of keeping things new. First, when Myers and I were dating, her family took a vacation and was out of town for a week. So being the head over heels in love boyfriend, I took the opportunity to drive over to her house and wash and detail her car. I spent at least 2-3 hours making sure everything was perfect. Now when I wash her car (every 6 months or so), it takes maybe 15-20 minutes and the attention to detail might be lacking. Back then, I wanted to impress her! I wanted to show her I loved her! I'm thankful to say our marriage doesn't hinge on whether or not I wash her car, but you get the point. The second story is of my salvation. I can vividly remember when I was at Children's camp (hosted by FBCPS by the way), and God pulled me to him! I made the decision that I wanted Him in my life. I was so excited, that I **RAN** as fast as I could to my mom's cabin. She was a volunteer at the camp that year. I knocked on that door as if I were trying to break it down. When she opened the door, I explained how I am now saved and Jesus lives in me! It was fresh! It was new! In our relationships with those we love, how much of what you call love has become just a habit? In our relationship with Jesus, how much of what you call love has become just a habit?

I love the challenge in Day 10. Rediscover the attitude of love in the everyday habits of your life. Take the things that have become mere habit and inject love into them again. Remember, when the love of Jesus is flowing into our lives, fear is driven out. I know I can't, but I know God can.

See you Sunday,

Minister of Communication, Steven Moreland

40 Days of Love - Day 11

“Jesus Wept” John 11:35

Jesus wept. The shortest verse in the Bible but a powerful one as it shows the humanity of Jesus. Jesus was the Messiah, the Savior of the world, but he was also a beloved friend. Jesus shared a close relationship with Mary, Martha and Lazarus. He would often visit them in Bethany. Wasn't it nice to know that Jesus could get away from the crowds and just hang out with his friends! They were dear to Him. After Jesus heard the news that Lazarus was sick and had died, and after waiting a few days, he finally reached Bethany to find Mary and Martha grieving for their brother. John 11:33-36 says, “Therefore when Jesus saw her weeping and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. And He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to Him, “Lord, come and see.” Jesus wept.” Then the Jews said, “See how He loved Him!”.

In the devotion today, we are challenged to understand that “Feelings are Important” and by expressing them, it is good and healthy in relationships. Emotions can be uncomfortable and, when expressed, can come across as weak. They make us vulnerable to others. We tend to bottle them up inside so nobody can see how we really feel. Jesus could have held back the tears because after all, He knew that Lazarus would soon be brought back to life. But Jesus in his humanity expressed his emotion to his friends and followers. He showed tenderness to his character.

Today is the day after Valentine's, and probably many of you expressed emotions of love yesterday to those you are closest too. If not, take the time today to express your feelings to those you love. Share a hug, a smile, a handshake (or fist bump, less germs!) or even dare to shed a tear. By sharing these emotions, it just might make you feel better and maybe even make your day.

See you Sunday,

Minister of Children, Rebecca Rakestraw

40 Days of Love - Day 12

“If your right hand causes you to sin, cast it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell” (Matthew 5:30).

Hyperbole is deliberate exaggeration to make a point; Jesus used it as an attention getter. This verse has captured the attention of people like us for millennia. Gouging out eyes and cutting off hands or other offending organs is not the answer. But He gets our attention and lets us know that we are not to use and abuse others.

God will not allow us in the long term to think of others nor use them as objects. Jesus says we are to love them. The Louvre in Paris will not let you walk in with a can of Krylon and spray your initials on priceless works of art, and God will not allow us to deface precious people created in His image – men and women, who just like all the children of the world, He loves and deems precious. He will hold us accountable when we use and abuse those He loves. He says, “love your neighbor as yourself” (Matthew 22:39b).

Thanking Him today for His love, and for His grace that makes it possible for us to love our neighbor. Amen.

See you Sunday,

Senior Pastor, Mike Woods