

## The Opportunity Before Us - Chapter 5 – Rev. Kris Mutzenberger

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, or a dreamer? An entrepreneur or someone who's generous? Did you invent something? Do you have a patent? Maybe you are a real local sports legend. Are you known as a writer or a 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 were celebrating the Passover together, Jesus does something unexpected. That is part of what Jesus is known for. I think, 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 the 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 asked them, "Do you understand what I have done? I have set the example for how you are to be to and for one another."

In this act, he's showing humility, servant leadership, and love. And 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 that 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 that the research shows that those inside the church believe that they're loving and welcoming, but that is not how those outside of the church necessarily 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, judgemental, self-righteous, and arrogant. In stark contrast, Christians think of themselves as compassionate and loving.

Friends, we have some work to do. Jesus calls us to be known by our love. As a whole, we are not. We are not known by our love, especially by nonbelievers who are the very folks that we want to 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 to look like, to live in love of God and love of others.

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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 this: They love. They know Jesus. They love.

What does it look like to love? 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.

The author of *Multiplying Love*, Paul Chilcote, begins this week's text with Colossians chapter three: "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 Paul's letter to the Romans in chapter 12, love looks like outward care, holding onto what's good, showing honor, being enthusiastic, serving the Lord, joyful, patient, prayerful, generous, welcoming of strangers, blessing people, being genuine with people no matter what they're feeling, treating others as equals, not thinking we are better than anyone else, showing respect and 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 it looks like and how we can live that in our, our families, our churches, our communities, and our 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 for your church is that you live love in such a way that your love becomes your identity. May you be known by your love.

Amen.