

SERIES: MISSION 2022
SERMON: LOVE BEGINS HERE
1-9-22

OPENER:

ILLUSTRATION:

The real estate market is buzzing and houses are selling fast. I drove by a house is for sale this past week. In bold green letters, the lawn sign reads: “I’m Gorgeous Inside!”

The message is surprising. From the street, the house is ordinary, even run-down. It’s a seventies-era raised ranch with dingy white vinyl siding and it’s located on a busy road. The bushes are too big, the windows are too small, and the backyard is non-existent. But the sign encourages me to believe there is something more beautiful—and more valuable—about this seemingly ho-hum house than I can appreciate from the curb.

The local church is a little like that house. At first glance, “the house of God” is not that sensational: a gathering of ordinary people committed to a largely invisible mission. We are young and old, male and female, single and married, unemployed and overworked. None of us is much to look at. We sing slightly off-key, and we can’t always clearly articulate the faith we profess.

BUT THE CHURCH HAS MORE BEAUTY AND VALUE THAN WE CAN SEE WITH OUR PHYSICAL EYES.

Like the Old Testament tabernacle that was covered on the outside with ram’s skins and goat hair but ornamented inside with gold and silver, the ordinary-looking church is actually much more than it seems.

John 13:35 (NLT) So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. ³⁵ Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples.”

**THIS IS THE BEAUTY OF THE CHURCH.
THE LOVE WE SHARE FOR EACH OTHER.**

**WHEN WE LOVE EACH OTHER WE SHOW THE WORLD THE WORLD THAT
JESUS IS REAL.**

LAST WEEK’S MESSAGE.....

> TO KNOW GOD IS TO KNOW LOVE

> TO KNOW GOD IS TO LOVE LIKE GOD

1 John 4:7-8 (NLT) Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. ⁸ But anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love.

YOU CAN'T KNOW GOD WITHOUT KNOWING LOVE BECAUSE THAT IS WHO HE IS.

1 Peter 4:17 (NLT) For it is time for judgment to begin with God's household; and if it begins with us, what will the outcome be for those who do not obey the gospel of God?

LOVE BEGINS HERE.

BEFORE WE CAN EVER LOVE THE WORLD, WE HAVE TO LEARN TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER.

**LOVE BEGINS IN THE CHURCH.
LOVE BEGINS HERE.**

I. JESUS COMMANDS US TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER

John 13:35 (NLT) So now I am giving you a new commandment: Love each other. Just as I have loved you, you should love each other. ³⁵ Your love for one another will prove to the world that you are my disciples."

This commandment appears in several other places in the New Testament. (In.....John 13:34, John 15:12, John 15:17, Romans 13:8, 1 Thessalonians 3:12, 2 Thessalonians 1:3, 1 Peter 1:22 , 1 John 3:11, 1 John 3:23, 1 John 4:7, 1 John 4:11-12, and 2 John 5.)

HOW DO WE OBEY THIS COMMAND TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER?

**WE LOVE LIKE GOD LOVED US.
WE LOVE EACH OTHER WITH AGAPE LOVE.**

Agape love is - active, not abstract or passive. It is not just spoken. It is shown. It does not simply feel patient. It is patient! It does not simply have kind feelings. It does kind things.

1 John 3:18 (NLT) Dear children, let's not merely say that we love each other; let us show the truth by our actions.

**LOVE IS FULLY LOVE WHEN IT IS SHOWN.
LOVE IS FULLY LOVE WHEN IT ACTS.**

REAL LOVE TAKES THE FIRST STEP

**DON'T WAIT ON SOMEONE TO LOVE YOU - LOVE THEM FIRST.
THIS IS GOD'S LOVE.**

**REAL LOVE LOVES WHEN IT IS UNDESERVED.
BECAUSE WHILE WE STILL SINNERS GOD LOVED US AND SHOWED US HIS
LOVE.**

As I speak about the church this morning, and God's command for us love to each other, many of our feelings about the church are going to surface and be challenged. As I speak about the beauty and glory of the church. We sit here or watch online and say, "I don't see the beauty of the church. I don't feel that way. The church hurt me. The people of God let me down. I don't put a value on the house of God. It hasn't been a help to me in my life, but a disappointment. I use to be a part of church, but not anymore. I don't need the church."

II. A COMPLICATED CHURCH STORY

In the New Testament, many of the testimonies to the church's worth and beauty come from the writings of the Paul. This is surprising, too. If you think about it, Paul had a very complicated church story. He was a religious kid, but rather than growing up into love for God's people he worked against them

Philippians 3:5-6 (NLT) I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. ⁶ I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault.

Paul hated the church, celebrated the death of her first martyr, and used all his energies to strike down Christ's people wherever he could find them

Acts 8:1-3 (NLT) Saul was one of the witnesses, and he agreed completely with the killing of Stephen. A great wave of persecution began that day, sweeping over the church in Jerusalem; and all the believers except the apostles were scattered through the regions of Judea and Samaria. ² (Some devout men came and buried Stephen with great mourning.) ³ But Saul was going everywhere to destroy the church. He went from house to house, dragging out both men and women to throw them into prison.

Acts 9:1-2 (NLT) Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath and was eager to kill the Lord's followers. So he went to the high priest. ² He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them—both men and women—back to Jerusalem in chains.

**BUT ON PAUL'S WAY TO PERSECUTE THE CHURCH, CHRIST APPEARED TO
HIM, AND THE DIRECTION OF HIS
LIFE CHANGED.**

**OVERNIGHT, THE CHURCH'S ENEMY BECAME THE
CHURCH'S FRIEND.**

We might expect Paul's church story to be all sunshine and roses from that moment on. But, instead, new church-member Paul went on to experience many of the challenges of life in the local church.

- > He was viewed with skepticism by church leaders (Acts 9:26).
- > He suffered personal attacks from false-teachers and their disciples (2 Cor. 10:10).
- > He was misunderstood by other Christians (2 Pet. 3:16).
- > He had disagreements with other Christians (Acts 15:36–40).
- > He was disappointed by other Christians (see 2 Cor. 11:22–29).
- > He sat alone in prison, longing for committed fellow-workers but realizing *“they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ”* (Phil. 2:21).
- > And—in what may be the saddest verse in all of his letters —he recounts, *“At my first defense no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me”* (2 Tim. 4:16).

**IF ANYONE KNEW HOW DISAPPOINTING THE LOCAL CHURCH COULD BE, IT
WAS PAUL.**

AND YET PAUL DEARLY LOVED THE CHURCH.

**LOOKING AT PAUL'S LETTERS, WE CAN LEARN TO GROW IN OUR LOVE FOR
THE CHURCH EVEN WHEN IT'S HARD.**

Let me say this.....

**PAUL'S ENCOUNTER WITH CHRIST CHANGED HIS MOTIVATION TOWARD THE
CHURCH.**

JESUS SAID TO HIM, “YOU ARE PERSECUTING ME.”

“YOU ARE HATING ME.” “YOU ARE HURTING ME.”

“WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS TO ME.”

**WHEN WE HOLD ILL FEELINGS TOWARD OUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IN
CHRIST OR SPEAK BADLY ABOUT ONE ANOTHER, HOLD RESENTMENT AND
TREAT EACH OTHER WRONGLY WE ARE ACTUALLY HATING CHRIST.**

**I WONDER IF SOME OF US HAVE HAD A TRUE SPIRITUAL ENCOUNTER WITH
CHRIST OR JUST AN ENCOUNTER
WITH THE CHURCH.**

**OR MAYBE WE NEED A NEW ENCOUNTER WITH GOD TO RENEW OUR LOVE
FOR EACH OTHER.**

1 John 4:20 (NLT) If someone says, “I love God,” but hates a fellow believer, that person is a liar; for if we don't love people we can see, how can we love God, whom we cannot see?

TO LOVE CHRIST IS TO LOVE EACH OTHER.

EVEN IF YOU HAVE BEEN WRONGED BY SOMEONE IN THE CHURCH, OR HAD A BAD EXPERIENCE.

**TO TRULY LOVE CHRIST IS TO LOVE HIS BODY - THE CHURCH.
TO LOVE CHRIST AND TO KNOW CHRIST IS TO
LOVE EACH OTHER.**

The same Paul who experienced disappointment and betrayal in the church is the one who calls the church *beloved* at least a dozen times in his letters. He regularly refers to other Christians as *brothers and sisters*. He doesn't hesitate to address them as *saints*. Again and again, Paul loudly affirmed his love for God's people.

And due to his imprisonment, Paul couldn't often gather with the churches, but it was always his great desire. At least seven times in his letters Paul expresses his longing to be face-to-face with the churches he loved.

Romans 1:9-10 (NLT) God knows how often I pray for you. Day and night I bring you and your needs in prayer to God, whom I serve with all my heart by spreading the Good News about his Son. ¹⁰ One of the things I always pray for is the opportunity, God willing, to come at last to see you.

(Rom. 1:9–15; Rom. 15:23–24; 1 Cor. 16:7; Phil. 2:23–24; 1 Thess. 2:17; 3:10; 2 Tim. 1:4).

And, he repeatedly commands those who are privileged to be together to actually *be* together; face to face; greeting one another with a holy kiss (Rom. 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Thess. 5:26). No matter how often Paul wrote to the churches or prayed for them, he also wanted to be *with* them.

HOW DO WE LOVE EACH OTHER WITH THE LOVE OF GOD?

SHOW HONOR TO ONE ANOTHER

Paul wrote this instruction to the church at Rome.....

Romans 12:9-10 NLT) Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. ¹⁰ Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other.

Honor = hold in high regard, appreciate, to give glory.

Too often, instead of honoring each other, we are dishonoring and disgracing each other. When we are having a hard time at church, our inclination is to speak poorly of our fellow church members. To criticize. To gossip. To condemn with our words. To share our opinions in haste and disagreement and complaint. To distance ourselves from "that person" or "those people."

**BECAUSE WE DON'T HONOR EACH OTHER, WE DISHONOR
THE CHURCH.
WE DISGRACE IT'S REPUTATION TO THE WORLD.
AND ULTIMATELY WE DISGRACE GOD.**

**THE LIGHT OF THE CHURCH HAS BEEN SNUFFED OUT BECAUSE OF OUR
LACK OF LOVE.**

The ways we honor one another:

1. SPEAK WELL OF OTHERS

James 1: 26 (NLT) If you claim to be religious but don't control your tongue, you are fooling yourself, and your religion is worthless.

**OUR WORDS HAVE POWER.
POWER TO BREAK DOWN OR TO BUILD.
POWER TO BRING DEATH OR TO BRING LIFE.**

Proverbs 18:21 says death and life are in the power of the tongue.

2. DON'T DISCRIMINATE

James 2:1-4 (NLT) My dear brothers and sisters, how can you claim to have faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ if you favor some people over others? ² For example, suppose someone comes into your meeting dressed in fancy clothes and expensive jewelry, and another comes in who is poor and dressed in dirty clothes. ³ If you give special attention and a good seat to the rich person, but you say to the poor one, "You can stand over there, or else sit on the floor"—well, ⁴ doesn't this discrimination show that your judgments are guided by evil motives?

**PART OF THE GREAT BEAUTY OF THE CHURCH IS THE
UNIFIED DIVERSITY OF WHO WE ARE.
AND YET WE MAKE A PREJUDICE DISTINCTION OF EACH OTHER BECAUSE OF
OUR DIFFERENCES.**

Galatians 3:28. (NLT) There is no longer Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male and female. For you are all one in Christ Jesus

3. DON'T JUDGE

Luke 6:37 (NLT) Do not judge others, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn others, or it will all come back against you. Forgive others, and you will be forgiven.

Judge - pass a sentence

WE JUDGE WITH A SIN BAROMETER.

**SAYING YOUR SIN IS WORSE THAN MINE.
OR MY SIN SIN IS WORSE THAN YOURS.
AND THE BIBLE SAYS, “ALL HAVE SINNED....”**

4. FORGIVE OFFENSES

Ephesians 4:32 (NLT) Be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you.

OFFENSE IS A HUGE STUMBLING BLOCK OF THE GLORY OF THE CHURCH.

5. DON'T BE JEALOUS

1 Peter 2:1 (NLT) So get rid of all evil behavior. Be done with all deceit, hypocrisy, jealousy, and all unkind speech.

**I'VE FOUND THAT PEOPLE WHO DEAL WITH JEALOUSY HAVE NOT FOUND
THEIR IDENTITY IN CHRIST BUT IN WHAT OTHER THINK.
HOW CAN WE BE JEALOUS OF CHRIST IN EACH OTHER?**

6. SERVE OTHERS

Philippians 2:3-4 (NLT) “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.

The apostle Paul loved the church with his words and his affection, and he also loved the church with his actions. On behalf of the churches, he worked tirelessly, prayed night and day, and was willing even to be “poured out as a drink offering upon the sacrificial offering of [their] faith.

When we serve the church—sacrificially investing in its well-being in any way that we are able—we will find that, like Paul, our lives become knit to God’s people. As we deliberately love them with our actions, we will begin to love them with our hearts.

CLOSING:

We are going to be talking more about growing in love and friendship with one another.

Let me say this, Don’t wait on someone else to love you. Take the first step and reach out in love to others. This revolution has to start with someone.

Ask yourself today:

- > How can I begin to show love to my family here at TLC?**
- > How can I grow in God's love for my church family?**
- > How can I put my words into action and not just say I love you?**
- > What actions do I need to repent of that have been dishonoring to this house and stifling to the move and presence of the Holy Spirit?**
- > Have I been waiting on someone else to take the first step when I need to?**
- > Do I have unforgiveness toward the church because of something that happened in the past that I need to lay down so I can love the church like God wants me to.**
- > Do I have resentment toward someone in this house and need to forgive them and reconcile our relationship?**