

Editorial: Compassion: Remembering who we are in weighty times

May 19, 2021

“They will know we are Christians by our love, by our love. They will know we are Christians by our love,” so [the song](#) goes.

“By this all people will know that you are my disciples: If you have love for one another,” Jesus said, between washing his disciples’ feet and telling them he would be handed over to be killed (John 13:35).

Christian, we are to be known by our love. Put another way: We are to be known by our compassion.

On that, we can and do agree. What exactly constitutes love, or compassion? That is where we often find ourselves at odds.

Inasmuch as the compassion we demonstrate is the pudding’s proof we follow Jesus, in weighty times we need to remember who—and whose—we are.

Weighty issues calling for compassion

As with so many weeks during the last two years, the news has been weighty this last week.

Seemingly far away, Israel and Hamas are engaged in what some fear is a lead up to full-out war. I say, “seemingly far away,” because many of us take in this news as someone else’s problem, while others of us have direct connections to Israel and Palestine. For some of us, it’s home.

Closer to home for many Texans, [Gov. Greg Abbott](#) signed into law May 19 the [Texas Heartbeat Act](#). The new law prohibits abortions as early as six weeks, except in the case of medical emergencies. A novel provision of the law makes private citizens the enforcers, rather than the government.

The day before, Abbott issued an [executive order](#) prohibiting government entities from requiring masks. This includes public schools. Starting June 5, “no student, teacher, parent, or other staff member or visitor may be required to wear a face covering.” Previously, local school districts were allowed to enact their own policies.

And the day before that, the [Texas Senate](#) revived and passed legislation to ban “gender confirmation medical care” for those under age 18, except instances in which “a child is born with a medically verifiable genetic disorder of sex development, including ... [possessing] both ovarian and testicular tissue; or does not have the normal sex chromosome structure for male or female as determined by a physician through genetic testing.” [SB1311](#) has been sent to the [Texas House](#), which last week failed to pass a related bill.

Meanwhile, the [U.S. Supreme Court](#) agreed May 18 to take up a Mississippi abortion case involving a ban on abortions at 15 weeks. Proponents and opponents alike consider this case a challenge to the 1973 *Roe v Wade* decision legalizing abortion and will watch the Court’s decision closely.

At the same time all this is going on, Texans are trying to keep roofs on and water out of their homes. One [Dallas neighborhood](#) was hit by a tornado for the second time in two years.

And a weightless issue, maybe

Given everything else, a UFO story seems almost welcome. CBS’s [60 Minutes](#) aired a report May 16 about UAPs, what commonly are referred to

as UFOs. Apparently, the highest levels of the U.S. government really are paying attention to unidentified aerial phenomena, as evidenced by Sen. Marco Rubio, R-Fla., advocating for “a process to take it seriously ... to analyze the data.”

We’re doing our best to figure out how to be compassionate to our fellow earthlings, and now we might have to learn how to be compassionate toward aliens? Maybe so, which might make our compassion for each other all the more important.

Shouldering the weight

Even among Christians, we often divide over the issues mentioned above, and where we divide is ironic. We aren’t divided over compassion; we’re at odds over what compassion looks like.

Should we support or oppose Israel or the Palestinians? Should we allow or ban abortion? Should we or should we not wear masks and get vaccinated? How should we respond to those who identify as transgender?

We bring differing definitions of compassion to the legislative process and must understand no legislation will absolve us of the hard work of being compassionate to each other.

We are not likely to agree on a singular definition of compassion in relation to abortion, transgender, COVID-19 vaccinations and safety protocols, Israel and Palestine, or many other issues.

We can agree, however, that at least this world is paying attention to us, taking note of how we treat each other.

If we cannot be compassionate to each other as fellow Christians, how will others believe we can be compassionate toward them? That last sentence looks really good “on paper,” yet I know we’re going to struggle over

definitions.

At its root, compassion means “suffer with.” Whatever the specific expression of compassion, it must be more than sentiment or words; it must include suffering with those who suffer.

If we are known as followers of Jesus by our love, then it is imperative we remember who we are in these times. Christian, we are those crucified with Christ. We are those who “suffer with.” We are people of compassion.

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