

Loved
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Our Savior is Way Lutheran Church

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We are starting a new sermon series today that is going to take us from now through the beginning of June. And you think that seems a long way away, but it really isn't. It is coming pretty quickly. I think that the kids and my wife already have a countdown on the wall of how many days of school are left or we are getting so close, so close after Easter.

It is always that way. You see Easter is this huge moment where we get to proclaim that the victory of God is real. That Jesus has been raised from the dead, that *Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia!*

But because the victory of God is real, because the resurrection is real, it reminds us that we have a different way to live in this world, that God is a God who wants us to live within the world, knowing who He is and what He has done. And then He also gives us a purpose. He gives us a path to follow just as Jesus was the rabbi whom all the disciples followed. They wanted to walk His way. So, we are the same. We want to walk the way of Jesus. These two words seem to encapsulate what that way is all about, *Loved and Sent*.

So we are going to talk about these for the next few weeks, and this all came about from a book titled *Loved & Sent*. This was a book written by a classmate of mine from seminary, and he was at a church much like ours and looking for a way to encapsulate "How to bring everybody together in an understanding of who they are and what they are called to do as a congregation." And he looked through scripture and through prayer, and eventually he came to these two words, if we could just get these two words kind of written on our hearts and our minds and always operating based on those, the mission of the church to help more and more people connect with Jesus, to make the kingdom of God Great right here on earth as it is in heaven, then that is the path that God has called us to follow.

So, Loved & Sent. It really hits on these two ideas of who we are and why we matter. And at different times in your life, you may have stumbled over these questions. Who am I? Who am I going to be? During the end parts of high school and college, I had these questions constantly. What am I going to do with my life? Who am I really going to be? And it wasn't just about what I was going to do for a job or for a career, but it was what kind of person I wanted to be. Am I the kind of person who can walk into a room and crack a joke? Or am I the person who is going to sit kind of on the side? Am I a person who is going to have great integrity no matter what? Or do I have a lot of gray areas where I can make things work the way I want them? Am I a person who values peace over confrontation? We've made these choices in our lives. You try to figure out who we are and what we are all about. Then it filters into this next question. Once you think you have that figured out, then this other one comes up. Why do I matter? You start working, you start raising a family, you start doing all these things in life. And eventually, you get to a point where you wonder, does this have any impact? Am I actually making a difference in the world?

One of the things that I learned in college, and learned to love in college was spreadsheets. Anybody with me? Spreadsheets. Excel. Microsoft Excel. One of the greatest things in the whole world. You guys might think I'm crazy, but it really was. I was in physics and math, and when I learned that there was this tool that could do all of these mathematical operations instantaneously and get the right answer every time as long as I put in the right inputs, it was a whole game changer for me.

And so I learned how to manipulate it and use it. And it was great fun. Now, is that part of who I am? Is that part of my core identity? Does it help me answer this next question of why I matter? Is it going to make a difference in the world? Is knowing how to use Excel and spreadsheets going to make a difference in the world?

Some of us who are used to using those all the time may think negatively about them. You think, what does this have to do? Well, I think these questions broaden out when we start looking at scripture. When we start

looking at what God says about these things, He has a lot to say about these two questions.

On the other side of these questions are a couple of fears that we have. Am I really worth it for someone else to care about? Am I really worth it for someone else to love? Who am I? Am I worth anything for people to give me a second chance or a second look? On the other side, does what I do matter in any shape or size?

These are the fears that we all struggle with at different points in our lives to different levels. Loved & Sent speaks into this very clearly. In the scripture reading we just heard from 1 John, John says to us, “Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God.” And I want to focus on this. This seems very simple. Even people that I know that don’t go to church and don’t believe in Jesus but know about the church and Jesus, this is the kind of thing that they know. If Christianity was at its best, what would it be doing? It would be loving other people.

That is what Jesus did. He loved so many people that other people had cast out--the marginalized, the poor, the oppressed--the people that nobody would give a second glance to, the people whose hands nobody else would shake. Jesus loved them. So this makes sense, right? Love comes from God. Let us love one another, dear friends. But, there is something deeper here going on.

John is, first of all, calling all of us friends. As people of God, we are called to be friends. A people together, not individuals necessarily who kind of come and go and leave and throw up. But we are called to be a community of people who think the best of one another, who assume the best of each other.

And that is what you do with your friends, right? You don’t assume that your friends are always hiding something or saying things behind your back. That is not what friends are. We are friends. We assume the best. We want the best. We work for what is best for one another. And in this, we know that love comes from God.

This goes back to the very beginning of all things. Why were people created? In what way? Why did God do this? People were created, all of humanity was created out of love. Out of love. And that is still true today. You are here today because God loves you. You were created, and He loves you just by the very nature of your existence, not because of what you've done or because of what you haven't done. He loves you simply because you are here, and you are part of His creation.

You are someone that He wants to show and remind you that you are loved. You are someone He wants to restore back to Himself. This love starts with God. And as people who are created by Him, we were created in His image. What does it mean to be created in the image of God? Well, it means that we reflect who He is to the people around us.

We are like a mirror that reflects His goodness, His peace, His love, His kindness to those around us. So, John says, "Let us love one another. Love comes from God." It forms our identity, and then we reflect it to the people around us so that they would see who God is.

That is the reflection. That is the image that we are when we know that we are loved by God, and it forms our core of our identity. And we share Him with the world. They see His love and they start to see that simply by their very existence, they are loved by God too. And it starts to form their identity as well. Right here is this idea of being Loved and being Sent. They work together, always.

Here is the problem. So often in our world that is broken, we have to deal with these feelings. Feelings of abandonment. Feelings of, "Could I ever be worth somebody loving again?" Feeling that I can't really get close to this person because I know they are going to leave. This idea of the things that I do don't matter. Things are just useless. My gifts are not needed. My skills don't matter. My experiences aren't helpful here. When we live in this world of being afraid of being abandoned by others, of being afraid of being useless, it is a lonely, lonely, lonely existence.

It is fraught with so much suffering and pain, so much inner turmoil and struggle. I'm pretty sure we've all been through bits and pieces of this in

our lives too. If you haven't, then you've probably walked alongside someone who has. What scripture has to say to this experience is to go back to the basics, go back to who God says that you are, what He has called you to be and do.

And this goes directly to who we are and what we are here to be doing all throughout scripture from the beginning of time. The story of God and you has been a story of God trying to help you understand that you are His today and forever. This was Jesus' promise to the disciples before He ascended to heaven.

He said, "Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations by baptizing them and teaching them..." Yes, but what was His promise at the end? That He would be with us. How long? To the very end of all of the ages, to the very end of everything. He will be with us when we remember this that when everything else fades, when the world fades, Jesus is still there. That forms the core of who we are today and how we can live. Our identity is not formed based on the opinions that we have or even the politics that we have or the things that we have done. Our identity is formed in who God says we are. And God says that you are somebody that He loves. Somebody He loves so much that He sent His son Jesus to bring you back to Him, through His death and through His resurrection, because *Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, Alleluia!*

Because of that, you are brought back to Him. This love gives you that relationship with Jesus again. Not because of what you've done, but because you are loved. That is who each and every one of us is at our core. Think about how you can build a foundation for your family and for your life on that. No matter what your kids do that feels so ridiculous and so wrong, when you are built on that core, you can show them great love, straight love.

When you do things that you are ashamed of, that you feel guilty of, you can go back to this core and say, "God, I'm ashamed. I feel guilty for these things. I'm sorry." And what is God going to say to you? "I forgive you because you are loved." This is the core of who we are. We can build everything else on that. And in fact, we are called to do that. We are called

to build a purposeful life on this. This is the purpose that God has given to us to be built on that identity.

Jesus at his baptism, we see the same thing. God, for the benefit of everybody who was watching. When Jesus was baptized, God called out of heaven, “This is my son with whom I am well pleased.” And this image of the Spirit, the dove, descends upon Him. This image of the Trinity right there and God states His identity, “This is my son,” and His purpose, “through whom I will be well pleased.” This is who we are.

This is who God has made us to be full of identity and purpose. We are people who are loved and people who are sent. You see, I know that I am loved. I know that I’ve been forgiven. This forms the core of who I am. And so all the things that I can build with the gifts and the skills that I’ve been given, God can use for the good of His kingdom.

Over the next few weeks, we are going to dig into both of these things. The next three weeks, we are going to talk specifically about what it means to be loved and we are going to dig into The Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and how we are loved by each in unique ways. And then, we are going to turn our hearts and minds to how are we sent. And we are going to explore what it means to be sent using our stories, our experience, our callings, our vocations, our gifts and skills, to see how we can help other people know that they are loved. That is what is up for us the next few weeks.

I hope that you join us each and every week as we go through this because by that point, I think you are going to be encouraged not just in your own identity and purpose, but also in knowing that you are sent to others so that others can see how good God is for them, how much they are loved, and when they are struggling with wondering who they are and what they are called to do, you have a word of peace and of love for them, that God loves them, that He is with them always. And He gives them incredible things to do.

Let’s close with the word of prayer. Heavenly Father, we thank you for being with us today. We thank you for your wisdom. We thank you for

your word that you give to us, which transcends all of time. That means so much to us right here with the things that we are struggling with, the things that we are concerned with.

We pray, Lord, that you would allow each and every one of us to be shaped this week to remember that our core identity is who you say that we are. That we are your beloved, that we are your people, your creation. That you've given Jesus out of love to die for us and to rise again, to reconnect us back with you.

And that you give us a way to walk your way in this world. That we follow the way of Jesus by showing love to those around us. Give us eyes to see opportunities to make that real. Lord, we pray this, knowing that you listen, that you hear each and every time we pray. Lord, we come to you with all of this and we give you thanks.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.