

Loved by the Father

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Our Savior is Way Lutheran Church

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Two words, *Loved* and *Sent*. Why these two words? Because it seems throughout all of scripture, the way that God relates to us comes down to these two.

Today, we are going to focus on the first person of the Trinity, God the Father, and we are going to see how He loves us. And through these two scripture readings we had today, we get a really great picture of what this is all about. In 1st John, John sums it up for us like this. See how very much the Father loves us, for He calls us His children, and that is what we are.

Now, he does not need that last part, does he? He calls us His children, but there is this emphasis on that is what we are. And we are going to see in just a little bit how much that means. How much that means.

I do not know about you, I do not know where your life has taken you, I do not know how life started for you, I do not know many of your stories. But here's what I know about our world and about our community. When we talk about God as our Father, different people have different ideas of what that means based on the fathers that they've experienced in their lives. Maybe your father was somebody who was a disciplinarian, or maybe he was fun-loving, or maybe he was strict. Maybe he was too lax. Maybe he was somebody you admired. Maybe he was somebody who you did not admire. In all of these things, we get this picture of what fathers could be, what fathers are.

But when we talk about God as our Father, as He reveals Himself to us and says, "I am your Father," we get this idea of what the perfect Father is like, about a father whose love for us is truly unfailing, about a father who is present with us through everything—not just when the times are good or when we are behaving ourselves—a father who is with us through all of the things that we will go through. This is the type of father that God is showing Himself to be.

And He does not just talk the talk; He walks the walk. He really does show up for us in those lowest of times, in those most difficult moments. His promise is good, and it is true. So when John says, “See how very much the Father loves us. He calls us His children from the very beginning,” God the Father is saying, “You are part of my family here at Our Savior’s Way.”

This comes to the forefront. When we baptize someone, right over here at our baptismal font, we say, “Your name has been written in the Book of Life from today throughout all of eternity to the very end of all of the ages.” God knows your name. He knows who you are. Today, I want to remind you whose you are, that you are His, that He has named you, that He has called you to be a part of His family.

And just like John would say, and that’s what you are. I’m going to reiterate it over and over again, because sometimes it’s difficult for us to see that. You feel that and experience that in our story today, the story of the Prodigal Son. In the story, we get a picture of how the Father loves.

It’s a funny thing. We call this the story of the Prodigal Son, but really it’s a story about the father. It’s about who the father is, about what his heart is all about. So I want you to pay attention as we talk through bits and pieces of it. Do not get hung up too much on the sons. Pay attention to what the father does.

The very beginning of the story starts with the younger son, and Jesus is telling this story amongst a crowd, kind of like we have here today, a crowd of people who knew who God was, who knew the scriptures, who had been living out a relationship with God for a long time, and people who were just trying to figure out who God was for the very first time.

A mixed group, people who kind of knew the allusions to scripture and those who were hearing it for the very first time. So as Jesus tells this story, the two sons reach out and they hit each person a little bit differently. This younger son tells his father, “I want my share of your estate now before you die.” And what is he really saying to the father? Let’s put this in perspective. When do you receive an inheritance from your parents and your family? After they die, right? After they pass away, after they go to be with the Lord, that’s when you receive this inheritance. So what is this younger son saying to the father? He’s

saying, “I wish you were dead.” I wish you were dead. This is serious. This is him saying, “I’m part of this family. Now. I wish my father was dead. I would like to go do my own thing.” Now, do you think everybody else in the household appreciated this? I mean, it’s just a terrible thing to say to your father, but also the father agrees and gives him half of all of what he would receive in the inheritance.

So what does that do to the rest of the family? Well, they have half of the stuff and the things that they have before. And their other half is going away with a son who has disowned them. All of them. The younger son is struggling. And what he’s struggling with is his identity. He’s struggling with what it means to be a child of the father.

And at this moment he says, “I do not want anything to do with this. I do not want anything to do with this. Give me what’s already happened and let me go on my way.” And so he goes. And so he goes. And in this struggle, he’s rebelling against who the father has made him to be. Against who the father says that he is, and he wants to make his own way.

And as the story goes, he tries to make his own way and it’s good at first and then everything falls apart and all of life falls apart. All the struggles just hit him at once until the time comes when even the pigs that he is tending to were better off than him. Remember, pigs are not clean animals in Jewish society. If you were in contact with a pig, you would not be allowed to go and worship.

And everything he’s had, he has been able to do to take himself away from who he is, the Lord has made him to be, and yet in that moment, he says, “Even the hired hands in my father’s house are living better than I am. They have these things that I want that I just can’t get on my own. Let me go back.” And he rehearses the confession. He plays it over in his mind over and over again, what he would say to his father when he returns and all he’s asking for is to be taken on as a servant. So he does this. He goes back to His household, to where he got his name from, to the people from whom he took so much. And as he is on the way, the father sees him.

Now this is where things get crazy. The young man does not even get a chance to get his confession out. Before that, what does the father do?

He runs out to him. He sees him on the distance. There's a glimmer of hope, and the father runs to him, embraces him, and kisses him because he is filled with love. He is filled with love. The younger son can not even get words out of his mouth before he is hugged and welcomed back. Why? Because as much as the younger son tried to run away from who God had made him to be and who he said that he was, he still was. The father knew him and loved him, and he welcomes him. The son gets his confession going. "Father, I've sinned against both you and heaven. I'm no longer worthy of being called your son," but the father has none of that.

What did he say? He says it's time to celebrate because He responds with love to those who have run away, to those who have struggled, to those who have suffered, to those who have wondered who they really are, to those who have run away from God. He responds to you with love. He wants you to be a part of His family because He knows you, because He loves you, because He has created you, because He wants you to be with Him throughout all of the ages. His response is love.

And so they celebrate and the father puts it just like this. "The son of mine was dead. He is now returned to life. He was lost, but now he is found." These two ideas of being lost, of not understanding who you are, you've now found it. And where has he found it? Has he found it in everything that he knows? Has he worked his way back into the family? No, he is simply who the father has made him to be. He is, and the Father loves. This is who God is. This is when Jesus is telling the story, this is exactly the point He's trying to help everyone see. He's trying to soften our hardened hearts to see how much and how far God will go to love us.

Maybe your heart has been hardened by things that have happened in your life. But God comes to you and says, when that opens up, when that softens, I am there for you. I will always be there for you. This is not the end of the story though, because remember who is Jesus talking to? He's talking to a mixed group of people, people who have been like the prodigal son who have not known whose they are. And now when Jesus proclaims and says, the Father loves you, I think many of them believed. They thought this God really does love me. But then there were the others, the people who have been loved, who knew they were part of the group. They are part of the crowd. They are part of the people of God.

They know whose they are. They know that they are loved, but then what? Well, there's more to this.

The older son then finds out what's happening. And he gets frustrated. And why does he get frustrated? Because he's struggling with his purpose, with understanding what he's supposed to do with this status as a child of God, as one who is greatly and dearly loved.

Remember, he's been with the father the whole time through all the struggles, through the lean years, through the frustrations with the younger son. I like to think that the older son even stuck up for his younger brother when everybody around him was complaining about what he had done to the family, and his older son had thought, "He's still my brother."

But yet on this day, when the father goes so lavishly seemingly overboard celebrating this wayward son, he forgets his purpose. His heart has been hardened. He has not seen what the father's purpose is in all of this. The older brother was angry. He would not go in the house. What does his father do? Does his father leave him in his anger?

No, the father comes out to him too. Is he running, kissing, embracing? Possibly. I do not know, but he's there. He comes out to him. He meets him where he is. And he begs him to join the family, to join the celebration. The older son says, "When this son of yours comes back, you are going to celebrate. But all this time I've been with you, you have not done anything for me." When I've asked for things, when I've prayed for things, when I've needed things to happen in my life, you have not responded, God. This is the older son, the one who knows he's loved. How is the father going to respond to him? Who, like one of us, cries out in our time of need, wondering where God is, but not seeing or feeling that presence. How does the father respond? He response first by reminding him that he's loved. It says, you have been with me through all of these things. You have been part of my family. You are my child. You are greatly and dearly loved. But at this moment, when somebody who has lost has been found, everything in heaven and on earth stops, and we celebrate. Because this is at the heart of what God is doing in this world.

His whole plan is to bring His people back to Himself. All of us who have been separated from Him by sin, by our mistakes, by the ways that we have turned away from God, He celebrates every single moment when one of us returns because that is all that He desires. This is why Jesus came. This is why He died for us. This is why He rose again. This is why in Easter, when we say Christ has risen, you say, He is risen indeed, Alleluiah. We say it again and again to remind ourselves, not only that we are loved, but that we are here to help others see that too. This is how we celebrate. We celebrate when the lost are found, when those who were dead have been made alive again.

And those of us who know this, who have known this for so long, sometimes our hearts get hardened, and it's difficult to see God's purpose and to focus on this core thing that he calls us to be and to do in this world, to share the love of Jesus, to share His salvation with others, to share that relationship that can be all of ours simply by seeing Jesus for who He is. This is what we are here for. This is what we've been sent to do.

The father says to him, we have to celebrate this happy day. Why? Because your brother who was dead has come back to life. He was lost. He stays focused on this, and he calls the older brother who was busy with so many other things doing so many other good things. They are all good things. He calls him to focus back and say, this is why we do all these good things, to celebrate on these days when my children returned to me.

The Father responds by reminding each of us of our purpose, that we are sent into this place, into this time, into this world to be people who share His love with others, that they might see Him for who He is, that they might see be brought back to life that they might see this life they've been chasing for so long through so many other means can only be found in Him today as the people of god here at Our Savior's Way.

Like I said, some of us are still investigating this. I hope that you see that you are loved. I hope that you know deep down within yourself that whatever you've been struggling with, whatever identity you've been trying to chase, know that God has already given you the best identity. You are His child. That is what you are. You are greatly and dearly loved. for those of us who know this, who this is encouraging for,

but who've been doing this for a long time, have been doing the work, who've been going along, doing lots of good things in the name of God for His kingdom, this is a reminder not to let our hearts get hardened, to stay focused on the mission, the central mission of what God has called us to do here, that through Jesus there is life, and He calls each one of us to see the people around us as the people that He loves, as His children, that we are sent among this community to bring His life and His love to those around us, that they might celebrate at this feast with us,

The story of the Prodigal Son, or the story of the Loving Father, the story of the older son, or the story of the Loving Father. It's kind of the story of the loving Father, is not it? It's all there. I pray today that you know that you are loved, that you know that you are sent, and that through God's Spirit, you have the courage to take that into every aspect of your life this week.

Let's close in prayer. Heavenly Father, today, you gift us with time. Time to spend in your word. Time to spend hearing these stories that Jesus told so many centuries ago that still hit us right at our core. Remind us today that we are greatly and dearly loved by you. Not for how well we follow you, not for who we are or what we have, but simply for who you call us to be that we are your children.

Let us rest in your grace. Remind us as well that we are sent into this world to be your people, to help others recognize this as well, that as we relate to them knowing their struggles, knowing the same ways that we have chased other things like they have, that we have a word of encouragement, a word of life to bring to them, that in Jesus, we are forgiven and freed.

In all of this, Lord, I pray that you would bless us as we go into this community to be a blessing to others.

In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.