

**Sent to Love**  
**May 12, 2024**

**Our Savior is Way Lutheran Church**

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Did you guys recognize that story? *The Story of the Good Samaritan*. We are reading some of the great stories from the bible in the last few weeks. Because in this series about *Loved & Sent*, we are talking about what it means to be *Loved* and what it means to be *Sent*. And we are making a turn this week. The last few weeks we have talked about God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, which corresponds to the windows that we have here in the sanctuary. If you have not noticed before, these stain glass windows show God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in all the different ways that they impact the world, all the different ways that they love you, and how that love is foundational for who you are and what God calls you to be.

Now, how do you make that real? That is the question. So, we are going to make this turn now into understanding. Yes, we are loved. We are greatly and dearly loved. And now what do we do with that? How do we make that real in the world that we live in right now? And this is where the *Sent* portion comes in.

Our focus is on identity. And it is on purpose, who you are and why you matter. This is just a statement that I hope that you know already: you do matter to God. When you question this, when you wonder if you matter at all, if you are making a difference in this world, know that everything that God has done has been to bring you back to Him.

He would not do that if you did not matter. You, your life, your unique gifts and skills and talents, your personality, everything that makes you who you are matters. You matter to God. And one of the neat things is because of that, He makes you matter to others. In other words, in all the ways that we are insecure about our relationships with other people, do we matter to so and so, do they really think about us, do they care about us, do they care what we do...

Most of us have been part of a team at one point in our lives, whether it was sports or whatever it was. When you are part of that team, what do you want to do? Well, some of us who are extra competitive, we want to be the best, right? We want to be the best one on the team. At the very least, you want to help the team. You want to pull your weight. You want to matter so that as long as you are doing your job, everything works out the right way. How many of you played baseball? I played baseball as a kid. And how many of you just played baseball and sat out in right field and picked daisies? There were some of us, right? But once you get past that stage, there's nine people playing, and every single one of them, no matter what happens, has a role to play. The ball may not come your way, but you need to move, you need to be aware, you need to be doing something that is helping. We try our best to matter to others, yet we still question whether we have made a difference.

I want you to hold on to this today, that not only do you matter to God, but that who He is to you actually makes a difference. You matter to others. He is the one who helps you matter to others because when we are weak, He is strong. He is the one that does this for us. And so, we are sent into this world to love the people around us.

We are going to talk about how this works in our readings today from Romans and from what Jesus said about the Good Samaritan. But there was a third reading that we read in our earlier service, and it is from Deuteronomy 6. It is often called the Great Commandment. This is how scripture works—all of scripture fits together and works together. So long, long, long time ago, God said to His people, “You are mine, and I am yours. There is one God, and I am He, and you will be my people, and with all your strength, and soul, and might, and everything else, you are going to love me just as I love you.”

And then Jesus, right before He goes to heaven, the last thing He says to His people here is the Great Commission: “Go into all the world and show exactly who I am. Make disciples by baptizing and teaching and reminding people that I will be with you to the very end of the age.” The Great Commandment forms the people out of great love. The Great Commission gives purpose. In Deuteronomy 6, we see this front and center. “Listen, O Israel, hear O Israel, the Lord, our God is one. You must love the Lord your God with all of your hearts, all of your soul, and all of your strength.”

So how do you love somebody with your whole heart? Well, don't forget this is Mother's Day. I have seen many people with their mothers here this morning, which has been really nice to see too. You are focusing on that with your heart, with your emotions, with paying attention to others.

How do you love with all of your soul? What you love with all that you are, all the things that matter that will last for all of eternity, with the kindness that you show, with the way that you show others who God is, with all of your soul.

How do you love with all of your strength? How do we love with all of our strength while we try? How good do we do at this one? How would you rate yourself? Keep this in your head. Scale of one to ten. How strong are you at loving the people nearest you? When we are honest with ourselves, that score does not look too great. We would want it to be higher. But again, in our weakness, He is strong. He is strong with all your strength.

There is another neat thing about this, too. In Hebrew, in the language this was written in, it is not really the word strength there. In Hebrew word, *meod*, which literally means *much*. In English, it is much awkward to say this word too many times. It feels really weird to say in this context, *much*.

So, what it is saying is you must love the Lord your God with all of your heart, all of your soul, and all of your *much*. Now if we translated it that way in English, it would not work right, would it? And so, we use the word strength because it somewhat encapsulates it. But when you go back to *much*, there is actually so much more to it.

There's much more to it. This idea of loving the Lord your God with all of your heart and all of your soul, with the way God has made you—your body and your spirit, but then it is everything else. This *muchness* encapsulates everything that is not able to be enunciated. All those things that you wanted to write in that Mother's Day card that you just could not find the words for—that is the *muchness*. Love the Lord your God with every breath, with everything, with every opportunity, with every gift, with everything that comes your way, love the Lord your God.

God is forming His people out of His own love because this is how He has loved us—unfailingly, unconditionally giving up everything just to bring

us back to Him. And so, He calls us to love Him the same way with everything that we are every day, every moment and every opportunity. Love the Lord our God.

Now this, why do we spend so much time on this? Well, this is going to inform what Jesus says. In fact, this is the whole background behind what this man comes to Him and questions Him about.

You see the people come to Jesus, and they question Him. They say, “Well, what kind of teacher are you? Are you a good rabbi? Do you really know what’s happening? Do you know the scriptures well enough?” So, they test Him. They kept testing Him and testing Him and testing Him. And one of them said, “What’s the greatest commandment?” Almost like it was a trap. But Jesus knew exactly. And He quoted Deuteronomy 6: *Love the Lord your God with everything that you are.* And, He said, a second is equally important. *Love your neighbor as yourself.*

Have you guys heard that before? This is an easy thing. Love your neighbor as yourself. This is something that is on bumper stickers, T-shirts, mugs, and many other things. It is just a normal thing. Now, do we always do this? That is a whole other question. But we know this, love the people around us the way that we are loved. In fact, sometimes I think that this commandment, love your neighbors as yourself, becomes one of those things that always exists but just fades into the background.

Do you have those things like at the place where you live or the place that you work where somebody new comes in; they notice something, and you are like, “Oh yeah, it has been that way for like five years. I have just stopped noticing. I do not know what that is all about.” I feel like this commandment is like that. We know what we are supposed to do, but in so many ways, we have just kind of put it in the background until it becomes just a saying, just a bumper sticker, just a nice thing to think about.

We know we are supposed to do this, but you know we can get by and do life mostly without it. Has this become mostly harmless? And is there a problem with that? If when Jesus is asked, what are the two greatest things you can do in all your life? The first is to love God with everything that we are, and the second is to love our neighbors as God has loved us. Shouldn’t that take center stage? Is it maybe there’s something there that

helps us to see that it truly is more important than we are making it? When we look at how God loves us, how we are called to love Him with heart and soul, with our body and our soul, all that He has created us to be, with everything else, this *muchness*, if we are supposed to use that love and translate that to the people around us, we have got to think that this *muchness*, this strength, this extra stuff, it is not about making us look better. We do not try to love our neighbors as ourselves so that people see us and say, “That is a really great person. That person is just like the best. That is the best person I have ever met.” They might say that about you. I do not know. That is not the point. The *muchness* that you have been given, the strength, all the things, the gifts and skills and talents and opportunities you have been given are not to be used to make you rise up in status to look better. They are meant to serve the people around you.

This is how risky and how radical Jesus’ statement is to love your neighbor as yourself. God has given up everything to love you. And He calls us to give up everything to love the people around us. This is hard. This is scary. This is risky. This is really something that I do not know how many people we see that truly do this. And so, it is natural going back to the people that were questioning Jesus in this time.

After He says this, the man says, “Who then am I supposed to love?” He wants Jesus to define who his neighbor is because, well, how is he supposed to know who he is supposed to love? What do you guys think? How would you answer this question? Who is your neighbor? Is it just the people who kind of live directly around you? Is it the people that go to work with you? How do we do this? How do we make this delineation? Who is our neighbor?

Everyone. Everyone is our neighbor.

So let me get this right. You are telling me that I am supposed to love, to sacrificially give up the things that God has called me to be, to do, and the opportunities He’s given to me in time, talents, and treasure, I am supposed to give that up for everyone? Is that what you are telling me?

You seem less certain. But that is the truth, is it not? The less certainty is the difficulty in this and how easy it is to shove it off to the side and to let it fade away. But this man asks because he wants to know, he wants to do the right thing, but he wants to do it for the people that he knows.

You have heard the Good Samaritan story at some point in time. The basic story goes, two people come upon somebody who is hurt, who is probably dying, and they are people of authority and of means, people who are supposed to know right from wrong, who are supposed to be examples to the community, and they pass by. And the third person comes and takes care of the person, extravagantly, giving up silver and taking care of bills, like, just, unlimited.

Now, the neat thing is that the people in Jesus's day already knew this story. This was not a new story that Jesus told. This story was being told by the people who were asking. And so, when the Pharisees and the people around Jesus who are testing Him hear Him start this story by saying, "And there was a man on the side of the road and the priest came and the Levite came," they were nodding along. They are like, "Yes, we know this story. We know how it ends. It ends with the Pharisee coming along and saving the person, and I am one of those. I am going to turn out to be the good guy." This is what they think. This is what they know. They already know the end of the story.

But Jesus changes it on them. This is where He flips it around. This is where He takes us. He says, you think you know how this works, but I am going to make things even bigger and more complicated and more difficult than you could ever imagine by reminding you that your neighbor is not just the people who are like you. They are not just the people within the boxes that you have created. But your neighbors are all the people that my Father and I have made. This whole creation, everything that we love, that is your neighbor. And so who is going to take care of it? Well, the awful Samaritans.

Samaria was an area just north of Jerusalem. And people who are traveling from the north to the south would not travel directly through it. It was a little bit dangerous, but mostly they just did not want to be near those people. They would go all the way around out of their way to travel from north to south. The Samaritans used to be together with the people of Jerusalem, but they separated themselves. They had their own mountain to worship on. They had their own scriptures. They used to be family, but then they were torn apart. And just like we do with our sports teams and our regional things and people that we have assumptions about, they did the same thing.

So when Jesus says the Samaritan came along and did all of these merciful things that the Pharisees thought that they were the ones to do, it changed their whole idea of who their neighbor was. No longer will Jesus allow us to stick with the divisions that we have created. No longer will He allow us to stick with the assumptions that we have about people who are different from us in any way that you can determine. He will not have it. Instead, He says we are all neighbors, and we are all called to love one another.

This was an incredible, incredible challenge. But the funny thing is that what I am telling you right now, I am not teaching you something brand new. You already know this. You know this somewhere deep inside that the people around you are your neighbors. You know that they are just as loved as you are by God. This is how He has made us to be. This is how God created us to know that we are His creations, to know that we are loved, but we have broken that with our divisions, with our assumptions, the ways we divide ourselves from one another.

Be reminded today by Jesus that this is who we are. People who are greatly and dearly loved. The man understood the point. But he was still holding out, just like the older brother in the prodigal son story. He cannot even say “the Samaritan”, right? Who did the right thing? And the man replies, “The one who showed mercy.” The one who showed mercy. That is right. The one who loved the neighbor just as he had been loved.

You are greatly and dearly loved. Jesus has shown this love for you on the cross and by being raised from the dead, you know this. You have been encouraged in this. You build your life on this. Now love the people around you in the same way. It is going to be difficult, but this is what Jesus calls us to do.

Take that love and go. Help other people see God more clearly through the love that you show, through His love that you show. In our book that we have been reading through, Pastor Claytor puts it like this. To love is to risk it all. It requires more than we think we can give. In fact, when we love, it leads us to prayer. Why does it lead us to prayer? Because that is our connection with God. That is our talking to God. Because when we love, when we are called to love people, when it is difficult, we are going to think, I am not strong enough to do this. And then God will remind you that He has given you the *muchness* that you need.

When we are weak, He is strong in our place, and He gives us what we need to show a love to others. Love drives us back to the one who has first loved us. With His love, we reach out to the people around us. And when we do, they see Him. In that, we have great joy. We have great joy. We are Sent to Love.

The next couple weeks we are going to talk about our stories and our experiences and how that works, how we can make that real. Not in an abstract way, but in a very particular way. How do we actually show love to others who are our neighbors, who we may not know, who we may see only once or who we may walk along a journey with? How do we make that work? How do our stories play into that? We will continue with that next week.

Let's close with prayer. Heavenly Father, we thank you for being with us today, for reminding us how greatly loved that we are, reminding us that the foundation of our lives is built upon your love for us.

This love given freely, given unconditionally, not because of what we have done or how good we are or what we could be but simply because we are yours.

Lord, change our hearts; change our eyes; change our minds to see the people around us as exactly the same, as people who are also greatly and dearly loved. Lord, allow us to share your love with them that they might have their eyes open to see that this love, this foundation from you, is theirs as well. In this way, Lord, your kingdom will come right here on earth as it is in heaven.

All this we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.