

**Sunday, August 18, 2019 – “The Results Are In!” Series II
“Sent to Love”**

Romans 12: 9-21; Matthew 22: 34-40

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Process Structure

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Today is the second in a three week series as we explore God’s vision and God’s purpose for us as His people. Building on time in God’s Word, time in prayer, and feedback from you, members of the Mountain View community our “Beyond 2020” leadership team set upon this statement to describe the next chapter of our life together at Mountain View: **“We are God’s chosen people, adopted in baptism, forgiven through His Gifts and sent on His mission to love and disciple others.”** Last week we looked at the question, “Who does God say that we are?” and discussed that statement, focusing especially on Jesus’ words in instituting baptism, communion and forgiveness of sins – God says we are chosen, adopted, and forgiven through His chosen methods of sharing His love with us that we call Word and Sacrament. That is always and only the foundation, the basis of who we are – Christ crucified, risen, coming again choosing us for life in God’s family and forgiving us our sin. Everything else that we do stems from that reality, that Gospel, Good News as Easter people.

And again I’m thrilled with the wonderful feedback and work of the congregation in giving the Beyond 2020 team such wonderful Biblical truth to work with, because it does start with God, not us. The statement doesn’t confuse God sending us to do something with how God forgives us or why He loves us, all while keeping clear that God’s mission is important, straight from Him and vital to be carried out. It keeps clear focus on God being the actor and we, made new in Jesus, formed into disciples, go where Jesus goes. We are sent on His mission to love and disciple others. Today’s about **love**.

Romans 12: 9-13 reminds me of the camp I worked at in South Dakota during my summers in high school. It was our theme verse, all the staff memorized it. It’s a great picture of

what love between believers looks like – agape – selfless, sacrificial love that is sincere, hates evil, clings to what's good and so on. We see something similar in a descriptive snapshot of the life of the earliest days of the early church, right after the first Pentecost, when the total number of Christians numbered a little over 3,000. The way we love each other, do life together, share with each other as we're able and as others have needs. Our new life in Christ really does resemble a familial setting, building on what Jesus cultivated with His disciples. When it's working right, like in Acts 2, these new Christians and outsiders alike were filled with awe and the Lord kept adding daily to the number of those who were saved. And to be sure, we could go on for a year preaching about the possibilities and potential of how we love and how God leverages that to create faith in people, as well as the pitfalls and pratfalls we cause when we don't love well. The Ten Commandments themselves describe so much of what proper love for one's neighbor is – and isn't... all the while remembering how God first loved us.

In fact, the big-C Church *not* loving each other gets in the way of God's mission to the world. Who *hasn't* met someone no longer connected to the body of Christ because of the way they were not loved by Christians? Satan loves monkeying around with you and me and our sinful nature so that we treat each other poorly, speak ill of each other, make each others' lives more bitter. Not only do these hijinks hurt individual people but they hurt ministry and they hurt our witness to the world. Really, that's what sin does in general. That's what the 2nd commandment is all about. When we don't honor the name of God and keep it holy we make a poor impression on who our God is and how He deals with us – chosen, baptized and forgiven by His Gifts... that gets obscured.

But then we move into verse 14 and we see that the love we share goes beyond love for each other who already know Jesus. We pray for those who persecute us. We conduct ourselves without pride or conceitedness. We forgo revenge and self-serving, letting that be in God's hands... in fact, we repay unkindness with kindness, praying that God will lead that person to repentance.

This unreal reality is happening as we speak in Iran. Forty years ago during the Islamic revolution and the beginning of the hostage crisis best estimates are there were a total of just 500 known Christians throughout Iran – roughly the size of our membership roster at Mountain View. In the forty years since of hardline religious authority the number of Christians has swollen to at least half a million, perhaps as many as a million – still a small percentage of the 81 million population but remarkable growth nonetheless. Shi'ite Muslims in Iran are converting to Christianity by the household in a country where apostasy, abandoning your religion (in this case, Islam) is punishable by death.

How is God doing this? He's using the witness of Christians who care enough to love their neighbor and risk their own lives to tell them of their joy and the good news they have in Jesus in answer to their disillusionment and despair. Daring to love has thrilling, remarkable consequences in the hands of our God!

It's almost as if God designed it that way... oh wait, He did! In the leadup to the Passover where Jesus would die on the cross a Pharisee, a religious authority tests Him with a question about which was the greatest commandment in the Law. Jesus quotes from the book of Deuteronomy, "37 And he said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets."

These two commandments are a summary of the larger Ten Commandments. Love for God, love for our neighbor, fellow humans. Note that it's ALL about LOVE. Not only the 10 commandments, mind you, the Prophets, too. Law and Prophets are a euphemism for "Scripture" or "Bible." The whole thing is about God's love!

I know that it's tempting in anger, in frustration, in astonishment to look out at a world gone mad with lack of love, dismissal of God's plan and will, where things that ought to be grieved are celebrated and start lashing out. The natural reaction when we feel threatened is

either fight, flight or freeze. You may feel the need to hunker down, batten the hatches... or maybe break out the brass knuckles. Yet fear and vengeance both get in the way of that sincere, sacrificial agape love that risks the self for the sake of the neighbor – even if that neighbor is persecuting, or antagonistic, or an enemy. It's God's to avenge and repay, not ours.

Love, however, conquers all. Love pounds swords into plowshares, spears into pruning hooks. It turns hatred into repentance, sin into forgiveness, an ugly, wretched tool of death and violence in the cross into our hope for life and peace. The same God who worked that change, that conversion in us now sends us out to love – not only each other but the world, with all its warts and dangers.

Obviously, living this out isn't easy. It isn't neat or clean. It's messy and confusing. It's greyscale instead of black and white. Love for God, love for each other, love for truth and love for our neighbor are in an unending, delicate dance but there can be no doubt – it's precisely for *that* mission of Jesus that we've been sent.

Said another way, "Don't tell me what a friend I have in Jesus until I see what a friend I have in you." I think of Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 13: "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing." Our lives are that urgent mission field to love others – in the church, outside of the church, in keeping with God's command and who He calls us to be. And we have confidence that chosen, adopted and forgiven we are sent on His mission, with the love He first showed us, and the Holy Spirit who lives in us, to be about exactly that. In Jesus' name, Amen.