



A MESSAGE FROM THE OFFICE OF THE BISHOP June 2021

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Matthew 22:36-39 (NRSV)

36 "Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?" 37 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 greatest and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

As I write this article, we are just a few weeks away from the 2021 Synod Assembly, but as you read this, the Assembly may be over. During this day, in worship, in conversation, in the work we do together, we will have focused on the passage above and its seemingly simple ethic: Love God. Love People.



Hopefully, you have been inspired by stories about how God is getting this world loved through the words and actions of individuals, congregations, the Western North Dakota Synod, and the wider ELCA. You are a part of this amazing Love, because you are part of each of these expressions actively sharing God's love in the world.

As we move out of Synod Assembly, I invite you to a simple practice to carry the spirit of the assembly into your summer.

Find a place to sit quietly, maybe a favorite chair or a cozy bench in your backyard. Breathe deeply. Listen to the world around you and center your mind on the passage above. Read it a couple of times and let your mind wonder with God about what this passage is saying to you.

Now, fold a sheet of paper lengthwise. On one half, make a list of people in your community. Consider especially: People who have had a difficult year. People you don't know well. People you avoid or choose not to engage. People you know who might be lonely or hurting.

Turn your paper over and on the other half count your blessings – list the talents, skills and positive characteristics that you possess, the relationships you have, the resources at your disposal. What do those closest to you appreciate most about you?

Now open your page and consider these two columns together. How might Love be made tangible in the lives of those listed through actions that grow out of the blessings in your life? Draw lines connecting your gifts with people who might need them. Jot down ideas for actions you could take using gifts you've been given to remind someone in your community that they are loved – by God and by you.

In his book *Martin Luther and the Called Life*, Dr. Mark Tranvik writes,

If we live faithfully within our callings, we find many occasions where love is needed. After all, Christ was one who crossed boundaries. Cultural and religious taboos were often broken as he reached out to the sick, the whores, and the tax collectors. As those whose identity is yoked with Christ, we also go to the "hard" places . . . And here we meet the very face of Christ as promised in Matthew 25:31-46. We do not bring Christ to the world so much as we meet Christ in the world.¹

In many ways, the past 12-18 months have isolated us from one another. Quarantine, physical distancing, social media algorithms, differences of opinion, and the ability to choose like-minded conversation partners are just a few things that have allowed us to build caves of comfort where our own ideas, opinions, and fears are confirmed. And while these caves might feel safe and secure at first, they are really illusions that keep us from experiencing the fullness of the neighborhood in which Christ calls us to love and be loved.

So, consider your list, choose one action and go love somebody. May this summer be a time when we once again step outside and experience the Love of Christ made known in neighbor.

¹ Mark Tranvik. *Martin Luther and the Called Life* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2016), 73-74.