

Rev. Lynne Ogren
April 18, 2021 3rd Sunday of Easter, Year B

Zion Lutheran Church, Lewistown, MT
1 John 3:1-7; Luke 24:36b-48

Christ is risen! **He is risen indeed!** Alleluia! **Alleluia!**

Cameryn, Abbie, and Rylee, congratulations! You have completed your confirmation instruction! You all have put forth effort into your learning these past two years. You have participated and paid attention. You have asked questions and offered your own thoughts and insights. Even though confirmation was something you were told you would do, you made the most of it and I have watched you all grow in faith.

But your faith has been growing for a long time. You have gone to Sunday School, you have families that pray together, and you have been worshiping and engaging with the church since you were very young. These two years are a part of your life-long relationship with God. You will continue to question and learn and grow in faith for the rest of your life.

You are entering a season of your life when you will have a lot of decisions to make. I'm sure you have already been asked what you want to do with your life—what you want to be when you grow up. Soon you'll be choosing classes for high school that will determine what you'll do after high school. And whether you go off to college or trade school, go into the military, work or travel, people will ask you what your goals are, how your choices will support those goals, and if you are focused and determined about what you will become.

My hope is that along with all you learned in confirmation these past two years that you will carry with you this one beautiful truth—"See what love that Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are." That was the first verse of the passage Rylee read today.

We are children of God because of God's deep and abiding love for us. What we DO in our lives is secondary to who we ARE, God's beloved children.

The second verse says, "what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is that: when [Jesus] is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is." As we learn and change over our lifetimes, we are also becoming people who reflect the love and life of Jesus.

And that is the promise we have in this passage from 1 John, "what we will be has not yet been revealed." I don't know about you, but I find that to be really reassuring! Sometimes we think that once we are "grown up" that we should have a sense of what we are supposed to do or who we are supposed to be.

But the truth is the nuances of who we are will always be changing depending on our experiences, our successes and failures, the times we change our minds and go in a new way, the surprises—both exciting and challenging—that pop up unexpectedly.

Your interests will change. Your friendships and intimate relationships will change. Your generation will make more career changes than previous generations have.

The thing that will never change is God's love for you, and the fact that you will always and forever belong to God. When things go well, thank God for guiding you to that success! When

times are hard or disappointing or down-right scary, God is right there with you to walk beside you and to lead you through.

And, like your two years of confirmation, the ways we invest in our relationship with God makes a difference. It doesn't make a difference in how much God loves you, but it makes a difference in how we learn to trust and rely on God whose love for us will never fail us.

In the gospel reading today, the disciples had locked themselves away from the world. They were scared and confused because Jesus, their teacher and friend and leader had died. And even though the women told them the tomb was empty and he was alive, it seemed too hard to believe.

When Jesus showed up, he said, "Peace be with you." Then Luke says they were startled and terrified, and "in their joy they were disbelieving and still wondering." These are common reactions when we face troubled times. There will be many things in life that will startle and terrify you. Maybe you will come to worship or open your Bible and read Jesus' words of reassurance, "Peace be with you," and you might wonder and have a hard time believing that a few words from Jesus can make a difference.

But at the end of the gospel reading today, Jesus opened the disciples' minds to understand the scriptures. Jesus reminds the disciples of all the scriptures they knew—which came from the Old Testament for them—and that he was the fulfillment of God's promises that were made in those scriptures. And now they would be the ones to tell all that God had done in Jesus' life, death, and resurrection.

We are also called to give our witness to Jesus' power and presence in the world. And we have become witnesses through the witness of others. Think of all those who have had their mind's opened to both the Old and New Testament scriptures and have told others about what they have known and experienced so that you and I could know Jesus and the love of God.

Pastors, preachers, teachers, parents, grandparents, friends in every generation have passed along to the people they love what they have received from God through the witness of others.

On Wednesday we created a representation of baptism in a flower pot. The soil and plant represented the gift of eternal life. A candle represented the gift of the Holy Spirit—who ignites us with inspiration to live as God's people. Water represented the gift of forgiveness that both washes away our sin and refreshes us to learn and grow.

The fourth thing we put in our pots were some stones that represent the gift of God's people who give us a firm place to stand, sharing their faith with us—especially when we feel weak or unsure.

Who were some of the people you thought of when you placed those rocks in your pots this week?

Those people have been witnesses of God's love and power and presence to you. And today you are given the commission to do the same for others—to proclaim the Word of God in Christ through word and deed, and to strive for justice and peace in all the earth. Your calling, like that of the disciples, is to be the ones to say, "Peace be with you," to others.

Being a witness for Jesus is not just about saying the right words, it is about BE-ing the peace, living the peace that we have through Jesus Christ.

And you don't need to feel like you have that all figured out right now. I hope you will really claim for yourself today that truth that God loves you and will never let you go.

I hope you can trust today that you have a community of witnesses in this congregation—and in every congregation you might connect with in your life—who will stand by you as witnesses to Jesus' peace for you.

And I hope you can trust that you are ALREADY gifted and blessed by God to serve as a witness to others, even as you continue to learn and grow in the faith, hope, and life we have because we belong to God.

You have blessed my life just as you are now. And you will continue to be a blessing to others as you grow and journey throughout your life. God loves you. Trust that truth today and always.

Thanks be to God. Amen

Prayers of Intercession

Alive in the risen Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit, we bring our prayers before God who promises to hear us and answer in steadfast love.

A brief silence.

Living God, in the midst of Easter joy we are still filled with questions and wondering. Open our hearts and minds as we encounter the scriptures, so that the church embodies repentance and forgiveness in the name of Jesus to all nations. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Creating God, like a master artist you have fashioned the universe out of your love and delight. Heal your creation where it is in need of restoration, we pray especially for rain to nourish the crops and fields around us. Provide all the inhabitants of earth a peaceful and sustainable home. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Healing God, you hear the cries of those in need and answer them in their distress. Grant to those who are sick and suffering your compassion and nurse them back to health and wholeness, especially those listed in our bulletin and those we name in our hearts.

Be close to the hearts of the lonely. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

Loving Parent, you have given us such love that we should be called the children of God. Bless Abbie, Cameryn, and Rylee today, and renew us all in the blessings of Holy Baptism. Reveal yourself to us so that we in this community of faith will become more and more like you in our mutual love and bold witness. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

God of all times and ages, those who have died in you now see you as you are. We thank you for their lives among us. Assure us of the peace you have promised, that we may join them in everlasting life. Hear us, O God.

Your mercy is great.

In the hope of new life in Christ, we raise our prayers to you, trusting in your never-ending goodness and mercy; through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen.