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Zion Lutheran Church, Lewistown, Montana  
4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost, Year A

Matthew 10:40-42

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

Here we are—at the end of your two-year journey through Confirmation! I bet there were times when you thought it would never end. For me, it went pretty quickly! We had a great time at Flathead Lutheran Bible Camp two summers ago, and all of you contributed so much to our learning together. Thank you for that!

It always feels good to finish something, to check off the box, to look back and see how far you've gone, how much you've learned, and how you have changed. I hope you will do some of that reflection with your families as you celebrate this important day in your life.

I also want to remind you that every end leads to a new beginning, or a new way of moving forward. Think about it. When you finished at Lewis & Clark you started Junior High. Now that you've finished Junior High, you're getting ready to continue your education in High School.

The same is true with your life of faith. You have spent the last two years thinking and talking about God more intentionally than you probably ever have before. You have considered how your relationship with God through Jesus Christ is intertwined with all of your other relationships. You have spent time with people in our congregation, and maybe some you didn't really know very well before. And you have practiced new ways of praying and carrying your "church faith" into daily life.

Today you are invited to take a hold of the Christian faith, the faith of your baptism, and claim it for yourself. Today you will be asked to turn away from the powers that rebel against God and God's goodness and turn toward the ways of God that lead to life—for you and for those around you.

Often, Confirmation Sunday is celebrated on the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit fired up the disciples and sent them out to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to the whole world. We missed that opportunity this year, but our gospel reading is part of a different time when the disciples were sent by Jesus. It was actually their first mission trip, so this seems even more appropriate for you as young missionaries for Jesus.

Today's gospel is the third section of a longer speech Jesus gives to the twelve disciples. At the beginning he told them to go to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel." In other words, Jesus is sending them to the Jewish people, their family, friends, and neighbors. This is your mission field, too.

Someday you will venture out to college or work or military service and I wouldn't be surprised if one or more of you also follows a call to ministry in some form. At that point your mission field will become larger. So, like those first disciples, Jesus has us practice and learn how to spread his good news beginning with those we know best.

Their task is to proclaim that the kingdom of heaven has come near and to bring healing to those who are hurting. We learned together that the kingdom of heaven comes near in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Just as God's love came into the world through the person of Jesus, we are now sent into the world to share that same love. Just as Jesus went to the people who were hurting, lost, and afraid, we are sent to those same places with God's gifts of love, grace, and mercy.

In our gospel passage today, Jesus is wrapping up his instructions for the disciples, but he is also instructing those who are listening—and those of us who are reading his words. Even as we take up his call to be messengers of the gospel, we also remember that there are other messengers and we need to be ready to welcome them into our lives.

We are living in a turbulent time in the world. And one of the reasons it is so difficult is because there are different interpretations of what's going on. There are people arguing about whether or not face masks are necessary to help stop the spread of the coronavirus. There are people with different life perspectives—people of different races, different lifestyles, different opinions about almost every topic you can imagine.

This kind of conflict and disagreement isn't new. It's been going on since the creation of human beings, when Adam and Eve decided not to follow God's commands and go their own way. The challenge for us is to determine when the messages we are hearing are in line with God's ways and when they aren't.

The Old Testament reading from Jeremiah is about that very thing. Jeremiah was God's prophet and Hananiah was a false prophet. Hananiah was proclaiming sunshine and roses. His message was that everything was going to be OK so the people didn't need to worry. God would fix everything. Jeremiah told God's people that there were going to be hard times ahead. They had disobeyed God and it would be a long and difficult time before they would be able to go back to their homeland.

God is good. We claim that in our faith. But that doesn't mean that everything is going to be great all the time. Our role as Christ's apostles is to speak the truth about the brokenness in the world. We know that God doesn't usually come swooping in like Superman to fix it all. But that doesn't mean God isn't there.

That's the message Jesus came to bring—that God IS present in times of trouble, and that as God's people we don't shy away from trouble either, but we do what we can to show and tell the world about God's love for all people—the love we know through Jesus.

Jesus describes his messengers in three ways in the gospel reading today and we can see ourselves in these three ways, too.

First, we are prophets. A prophet brings God's word to others. That means we need to learn God's word, study it, and know it so well that we can both speak it and recognize it when we are looking for God's direction in our lives.

Second, we are righteous people. Remember, in Matthew's gospel righteousness is about being in right or good relationships with God and with others. God has claimed us as beloved children in our baptisms, and all we need to do is remember that! Our baptismal identity helps us proclaim the kingdom of heaven in the ways we interact with others, with respect and care, knowing that every person is known and loved by God, too.

And finally, we can identify with being the "little ones" who are in need of a cup of cold water. We don't usually like to see ourselves as being in need, but the truth is, we all need a cup of cold water on a warm day. Jesus shows us what it means to see and care for people who are overlooked, put down, and even despised. Our care for the "little ones" shows that just as God loves us, we share that love with anyone in need.

Your journey of faith began with your baptism. Today is an important milestone in that journey, one that sends you into the world with a new mission. But you don't go on that mission alone. You are surrounded by a community of believers who journey with you as we all "proclaim the good news of God in Christ through word and deed, serving all people, following the example of Jesus, and striving for justice and peace in all the earth."

You will be invited to claim that mission in just about those exact words in a few minutes. You each have asked challenging questions over the past two years. We have prayed together, examined God's word together, and explored ways to practice our faith on days other than Wednesdays and Sundays! As you enter this new season of your life of faith, I look forward to seeing how God will call you to speak, learn, and serve the world in the name of Jesus!

Thanks be to God! Amen