



Sunday, June 21, 2026
Matthew 10:24-39 (Fourth Sunday after Pentecost)

Ascension Lutheran Church
Pastor Tony Acompanado

Today is Father's Day, and for many people this day brings a mix of emotions. For some, it's a day of appreciation and celebration. We remember fathers, stepfathers, grandfathers, and father figures who taught us how to ride a bike, bait a hook, throw a ball, change a tire, balance a checkbook, or simply show up when life becomes difficult.

For others, Father's Day can be complicated. Some carry grief because their father is no longer with them. Some carry disappointment because a relationship was strained or absent. Some long to be fathers. Some mourn children. Some are raising children alone.

The beautiful thing about today's gospel is that it meets us in every one of those places. The gospel says, "*Come as you are*" not "*come back when your life is all put together.*" Come with your joy, your grief, your questions, your appreciation, and your wounds and scars.

Because the grace of God is always greater than whatever we carry through the doors of this church.

And perhaps that's especially important for us to hear today because life has a way of reminding us that we're not always in control. Sometimes we make plans. And then life changes them. I've been reminded of that a lot lately. Just when I thought I was overcoming one unexpected challenge with a foot injury, along comes a knee injury that I certainly didn't have anywhere on my radar.

Maybe you've had experiences like that too. You finally get one problem under control and another one appears. You pay one bill and another expense arrives. You deal with one health issue and new one pops up. Just when you think you've reached calm water, you discover there's another wave on the horizon.

Do you ever feel like life feels less like a straight road and more like a winding trail? Well, this brings me to the Wisconsin Dells. This past week a group of our JOLT students spent time together for Adventure Camp in the Dells. They climbed, explored, laughed, swam, learned, worshiped, and discovered that faith isn't something only discussed in a classroom. Faith is experienced on trails, around campfires, in conversations, and in moments when we encourage one another through challenges.

Our Young at Heart group knows this journey well also, because they enjoyed their own journey in the Dells on a boat trip through some of God's beautiful creation. What catches me is that these two groups – separated by decades of life experience – shared something important. Both groups were on a journey.

The young people are asking, "*Who am I becoming?*" The more seasoned adults are reflecting, "*What has God been doing throughout my life?*" One group is looking ahead. The other often looks back. And yet both discover the same truth...

That God is present on the journey. Not just at the beginning. Not just at the end. But every step along the way. The teens learned that. The older adults experienced that. And all of us need to hear it. Because so much of our lives are spent in the middle of the journey.

We live in a world that often feels uncertain. Over the last few weeks we've watched severe storms sweep across parts of Wisconsin and the Midwest, leaving damage and disruption behind. Many families have once again been reminded how quickly life can change. Our nation continues to wrestle with deep divisions and difficult conversations. Communities seek ways to bridge differences while addressing real challenges. Around the world, conflicts continue, tensions remain high, and many people wonder what the future will bring. International leaders continue to gather to address ongoing global concerns and instability.

And yet in the midst of all that uncertainty, this past week was also the celebration of Juneteenth – a reminder that hope can survive long seasons of waiting, and that God's desire for freedom, dignity, and justice is woven throughout the story of humanity.



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The world contains both heartbreak and hope. Both storms and sunshine. Both loss and new beginnings. And faith doesn't require us to ignore either reality. Faith simply reminds us which reality has the final say. The final word belongs to God's grace. The final word belongs to God's promises. The final word belongs to resurrection. The final word belongs to Jesus.

That's why we can be honest about life's struggles without becoming overwhelmed by them. Because we know who is walking alongside and ahead of us.

Many fathers understand this. And the older I get, the more I appreciate that fathers often carry burdens quietly. They worry about their families. They wonder if they're doing enough. They try to protect the people they love. Sometimes they succeed, and sometimes they make mistakes. But at their best, fathers offer us a glimpse into the dedicated love of God.

A father teaches a child to ride a bike. And the child may wobble, fall, get back up, fall again, and eventually learns to ride. What matters isn't that the child never falls. What matters is that someone is there helping them get back up. That's grace. And after all...isn't that how God deals with us?

We stumble. God lifts us up. We doubt. God remains faithful. We wander. God keeps searching. We grow tired. God provides strength. Again and again and again. That's the biblical story. And that's the story of *our* lives.

As most of you know by now, I'm getting ready to leave for my sabbatical. And occasionally people ask what a sabbatical is for. Well, part of the answer is rest. Part of the answer is renewal. Part of the answer is creating space to listen more deeply for God's voice. But perhaps the deepest answer is trust.

A sabbatical is a reminder that the church doesn't belong to any one pastor or person. It belongs to Christ. The ministry of Ascension doesn't pause because one person steps away for a time.

The Holy Spirit will continue to work. The gospel will continue to be proclaimed. People will continue to be loved. Children will continue to learn. Faith will continue to grow. God will continue to lead.

And maybe *that's* the lesson all of us need. Because sometimes we think everything depends on us. But God gently reminds us that it doesn't.

Sometimes we think we have to carry the whole world on our shoulders, but God reminds us that *he* already does. Sometimes we believe that *our* strength is the source of hope. But God reminds us that his grace is more than enough.

So today, whether you're a father or grandfather, whether Father's Day fills your heart with joy or with sadness, whether you're young or old, healthy or struggling, certain or uncertain, hear this good news...

You don't walk this journey alone. The God who guided Israel through the wilderness walks with you. The Christ who calmed the storm walks with you. The Spirit who empowered the first disciples walks with you.

On mountain tops and in the deepest, darkest valleys. At campfires and on boat rides. In doctor's offices and rehab appointments. During celebrations and disappointments. During sabbaticals and seasons of work. Through every twist and turn of the journey, and especially when the path feels uncertain, the grace of God is always certain.

When the future feels unclear, Jesus is still clear. When your strength is limited, God's love isn't.

That's our hope. That's our promise. That's our faith. And that's the good news for Father's Day and every day – that we are held, not by our own strength, but by the unending grace and love of God. Thanks be to God. Amen.