



Commence!



A message for our Hudson High School graduates of 2022

John 14:25-29

Rev. Dr. Dawn Jeffers Ramstad

Hudson United Methodist Church

22 May 2022

Today, our church celebrates the soon to arrive commencement of Nathan Amman, Braden DuCharme, Brennan DuCharme, Caleb Lindley, and Samantha Strumke from Hudson High School. We have known these five young adults since they were young children. We welcomed them as full members of our church five years ago, when they confirmed their baptisms. We have provided them a safe youth group, we have supported their mission trips, and we have included them in worship. One memorable contribution this class made to our church memories was their music selections for their confirmation service. They are the only group of confirmands I have known to choose Christmas carols as their favorite hymns.

This may explain a bit of why the worship team and I planned this service to honor them. But only a bit. The real reason we planned this service today to honor you is that we are keeping our vow to you, the vow we made at your confirmation. Keeping his vow is why Wes wanted to share memories of your giftedness as a class. Keeping her vow is why Darci wanted to sing a blessing for your future. Today we focus our shared love as you navigate the last passage of childhood. Today we keep this vow we made to you:

“We give thanks for all that God has already given you and we welcome you in Christian love. As members together with you in the body of Christ . . . we renew our covenant to faithfully participate in the ministries of the church by our prayer, our presence, our gifts, our service, and our witness that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.”ⁱ

Today our church gives God thanks for you. The end of today’s message is yours as you share with your church your plans for the near future. Answering “the so what question” about Jesus’ words and your future is my gift as your pastor.

I cannot think of a better Scripture for the middle than our Gospel reading for today. In it Jesus gave final instructions to his followers, including us, before his departure from earth through his death, his resurrection, and his ascension. Now we live in the long middle of time as we wait for his return. It is not unlike graduating from high school and accepting your adult life.

In the process of leaving Hudson High School, of leaving your parents' home, and of seeking your place in the world, your high school graduation day marks a clear point of change. On June 4th, you will wake up a senior enrolled in Hudson High School. That afternoon, you will walk across the stage and be handed a diploma. The instant you take your diploma, you are no longer a senior enrolled in Hudson High School. The instant you take your diploma, you become a Hudson High School alum. According to your teachers, your principal, your superintendent, and a good number of other authority figures in your life, with that diploma in your possession you are a graduate. You have met the requirements. Your high school work is done. You have made the grade, and therefore you graduate.

But your life is not done. The proper name for your graduation ceremony is “commencement.” Because as you step away with your diploma in hand, you commence to live the rest of your life. To commence is not to begin your journey, to commence is to leave where you stand now for your next life destination. To commence is to take your next step, to go on to your next adventure whatever it may be. And when “it” is complete—say when you graduate from college, or separate from the military, or lose a job you thought you wanted, or when your first child is born, or when your last child graduates from high school, or when your doctor says “cancer,” you will commence again. And again. And again. And today I hope in June 2072, (unless Christ returns before then) all y’all will reunite as the Hudson High School Class of ’22 and reflect together on life’s blessings.

There are things we, your church, have shared with you that we hope you will still be doing in 2072. What are they? We hope that you will still share stories of your hard times that bear witness to how the peace of Christ was yours. We hope that you will continue to have a church to call home, even if it is not this one that has loved you since you were young. We hope that you will continue to share the Good News with children yet to be born, and not just your own offspring. We hope your relationship Christ continues maturing.

Our human natures wish we could spare you from the hard times. But as Mary Poppins said, that is a pie-crust wish, “easily made and easily broken,”ⁱⁱⁱ because hard times come into every life. But we pray that both when your hard times come as well

as when joy surrounds you, you will remember the core of what we shared with you—Christ is with you and your church is His body wants to share both your hard time and your joy. Christ’s promise from today’s Gospel is made real when Christians pray together and serve each other. And what did Christ promise? “Peace, I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” (John 14:27)

It will be easier to live into this promise of Jesus if you find companions to share them with you. Because not all of us will be here on earth to celebrate that 50th class reunion with you in 2072. Some may be here, but speaking only for myself, I have no plans to be the 115-year-old pastor who prays at you class reunion. I am planning to celebrate your reunion with Warren Pagel and Jeanne Dieffenbach from a front row cloud in heaven. Although it would not hurt my immortal pride one little bit if one of you became the 68-year-old pastor who prays the blessing at your 50th class reunion. It is possible, even if you haven’t quite heard your Call yet. It is possible that in one of those hard times everyone has that you will find not only the peace of Christ, but you will also find Christ’s call to bring his peace to this world He love so much.

We all commence one step at a time. May you take that step with Jesus.

Amen.

ⁱ p. 43 *The United Methodist Hymnal*, The United Methodist Publishing House, Nashville, 1989.

ⁱⁱ *Mary Poppins*, Walt Disney Company, 1964.