I preached my first full sermon at Hope UCC in January 2006. In that first sermon I spoke about my calling to ministry. I announced to the community that I would be going to seminary to earn my Master in Divinity. I asked for the congregation’s support as I strove to follow my calling, not knowing exactly where that would lead. Ten and a half years and quite a journey later, here we are. This is my last full length sermon at Hope before I leave to become pastor at UCC Seneca Valley in Germantown, MD. My last Sunday with you will be July 17th, but as that is Camp Hope Sunday, I did not want to muddy the waters of that day with my thoughts and collected wisdom on leaving and intentional goodbyes. But this day, where the lectionary tells us the story of Jesus sending out the disciples ahead of him to share the good news of the gospel, seemed like a good fit. This Sunday where Jesus says “Go on your way. See I am sending you out,” seemed like an appropriate one in which to discuss how Hope UCC is sending me out, what I will take with me as I go, and how to say healthy and intentional goodbyes.

The story that Luke tells us about Jesus sending out the disciples is a rich one. I won’t be doing a close reading and explanation of it today, but I do want to take some lessons from it that spoke to me about how we have been in relationship together and how I see God working through those relationships. The disciples are sent off into a difficult world where they will not always be welcomed. They have no provisions, no back up, and no control. All they have is each other and God. But, Jesus says, that will be enough. God does not send us out into the world alone. We are to exist, to thrive, in community, with each other and with God. One commentary by David Lose put it like this, “And so Jesus sends them out in pairs. Thus, when one falters, the other can help. When one is lost, the other
can seek the way. When one is discouraged, the other can hold faith for both for a while. That’s what the company of believers does – we hold on to each other, console each other, encourage and embolden each other, and even believe for each other.”

To me this idea of community, of holding each other up, of comforting one another, cheering each other on, perfectly describes Hope UCC. After all, isn’t that what welcome, nurture, and share is all about? We do that here. Or at least we try to live that out the best way we know how. This is what you have taught me, have modeled for me, have given me to work with as I go out into the world. Depend on one another. Show up for one another, even when it’s hard to do so. In all the years I have been at Hope never have I felt abandoned and alone. Instead I was taught how to work and think and plug into the Spirit through collaborative work with my fellow staff members, lay leaders, and even Hope’s children. You supported me every step of the way, even when I missed the mark, even when I know I disappointed some of you, even when things seemed bleak and hopeless. I was never alone. God was there, yes. But God’s hands and feet and arms and legs and hearts and voice came to life in you. Thank you for that.

As I go from this church I know that I do not go alone. I go with your best wishes. I go in the context of our denomination, the wider family of the UCC. I go with God but I take you with me always. Just because I am no longer among you in person doesn’t mean you aren’t still in my prayers and my thoughts. I take you with me for you are now a part of me.