



Growth in Grace



A Sermon By
Ms. Eva Bogino

Youth Sunday
May 1, 2016

Grace Episcopal Church
Silver Spring, Maryland

*An audio version of this sermon can be found at on the Grace Church website at
<http://graceepiscopalchurch.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/2016-05-01-EB.mp3>.*

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A lot of people use the phrase “Growing in Grace” when discussing this church and its other activities. It signifies both people and projects maturing within the context of the church and, in terms of humanity, their inner spirituality. It’s about learning and understanding the key scriptures of the Bible, and acting on them to the best ability possible. It’s about the Episcopal Church, knowing more about the important figures, alive and deceased, and the huge impact of our parish, the entire national community, and the Anglican Communion.

I, for one, have certainly Grown in Grace. My parents may or may not have told the story to many of you about how we first chose our home parish. Remember the little boy from “The Omen,” screaming at the top of his lungs on the steps of the church? That was me at many places we visited, until we arrived on the steps of Grace.

Since then, I have been very grateful that young me decided against a temper tantrum that Sunday morning. Not long after that, I noticed my parents and I picked up more and more roles within the church, whether we asked to take part or not. When you think about it, there are very few roles my family has not completed. With each role, I learned something about my parents and our new church family. I met spectacular adults who taught me important life lessons.

From my dad’s time on vestry or dedication to the meats of men’s group, to my mom’s moments of Sunday school teaching to prayerful service within Daughters of the King, my family has dabbled in lots of areas and met lots of new faces. There’s the leaders on vestry that I looked to with an air of appreciation and admiration because without them, the church certainly wouldn’t be able to function. There’s all the “uncles” who share a love of bacon and a love of Christ that taught me fellowship makes a huge difference in the lives of others in the church, and that fundraising doesn’t have to be unfortunately laborious. There’s the young families in Sunday school who’ve shown me a love of Christ can be instilled in younger kids through not-overly-simplified Bible studies and crafts. There’s the “aunts” I’ve collected within the Daughters of the King who pray fervently and with a hope that God’s ear is always to them, which I certainly believe to be true.

There are, of course, individuals who have touched my spiritual life as well. Reverend Janice Robinson was someone we all could admire, but young eight year old me would not be standing here today if it weren’t for her, as she treated me like an adult within the walls of this church and taught me some of my most important lessons about keeping the faith. Lael Sorenson also treated me with that same respect and answered as many of my theological questions as she could, which, of course, were all of them. Reverend Eric gave me my first communion lessons; Reverend Kent welcomed me into youth group with open arms; Reverend Michelle winked with an all-knowing look at just the right times (and scolded me for yawning in church). Reverend Andrew has guided me (and chided me) towards a prayerful path and treated me with great

respect ever since he arrived, rather than talking down to me. Reverend Amanda has helped me understand my faith and impacted my life in ways I cannot even begin to describe.

There are also the non-priests, from all my second parental figures I've known over the years because I'm just a tad more mature than their sons, to all the other parental figures who have taught me how to sew, pray, cook, lead a meeting, engage in intellectual conversation, and believe in God. There's the other adults who, as I'm growing up and leaving my youth group and junior choir days behind, have welcomed me and treated me as an equal. Some of them are my inspiration to attend church, just so I can hear their singing or see their smile as I say hello.

All of these people, all of you, have become my family. They say it takes a village to raise a child, and I strongly believe it's a little bit more like a city of sorts, just like the one discussed in the second reading this morning. This church has seen me age at one of the most pivotal points in my life, and it has not simply stepped back and watched. In Sunday School, I was taught about the scripture from all points of view, and as I grew up, I was challenged to think about what it all meant on my own. As an acolyte, I learned to accept that sometimes I don't get to avoid responsibilities or do just what I want all the time—even with a temper tantrum—and I need to step up to the plate, and as I've grown up, I've been given an role to carry that cross down the aisle and lead the procession, which has been one of my highest honors. All my years in church choir have taught me both about singing in the name of praising God and singing to sing well and perform well. I've done many a solo with languages I do not and will never speak, yet I know the gravity of their words—and the challenge of their melodies—and I look to them as the most sacred prayers I can offer.

Ah, the fellowship, the praise, the camaraderie, the deep rooted spirituality, the intellectualism, the devotion, of this Grace Episcopal Church. Without it, I certainly would not stand before you today. I'd be a different person, probably someone not as intelligent, well spoken, mature, and authoritative as I am often considered to be. That being said, maybe I'd talk less and that might help some people get on their way sooner. Regardless, I know this church is special.

That's a key message in our scripture in Revelation. It speaks of a nation walking by the light of God, that needs no temple, no sun, no moon. Even though, so to speak, we are a temple, we are also that sort of small city. We're always hustle and bustle, always finding new things to do and committees to form. I mean really, do we have the committee to make committees yet? Either way, our constant movement is motivated by one thing—an adoration for God, his son, and the Holy Spirit, and a motivation to carry on God's work and, just as it said, to walk in his light. If there was ever a community to feel holy without any sort of tangible objects or elaborate shows of praise, it would be this church.

This unlabeled city does have a name within the scripture, and it is Jerusalem. Right now, and for a long time, there has been a problem in the Middle East about Jerusalem, between two forces who are fighting to own that land. There has never been a solution seen as effective because neither will compromise, and will sometimes attack with clouded reasoning as a motivation.

It's interesting to note, however, in the scripture, Jerusalem does not seem to have defined day or night, or even buildings. It lacks a temple. The people worship and pray often, and their deep-

rooted spirituality has given them blessed fruit and the presence of God and the Lamb. God is the city's light, and his presence keeps the city good and calm.

It's a touchy subject, but it does give a bit of light onto the current situation. Perhaps, rather than fighting over a physical place with a name attached, the key is to attend to current cities to make them as prayerful as possible. The same can be said of parishes across the nation. Rather than getting caught up in names and figures, it might be better to just aim to act as a child of God as often as possible.

Due to the deep spirituality in my church home, I have become a deeply spiritual person who is enriched by the style of this church. As I scanned through my college process, the thought of attending another Loyola school, or really any Catholic college, terrified me. Aren't we supposed to be Catholic Lite? I didn't think I could handle the whole Catholic deal! I also certainly didn't want a different level of protestant. Either swing of the pendulum felt as though I was leaving my physical and metaphorical temple of prayer, and I didn't want to branch out in such a way.

This led to my current college decision to attend Sewanee: The University of the South. To many, the response is "that's a long name!" or "that's in Georgia, or Kansas, or Texas, or Louisiana, right?" Yes, it's a long name, and no it's actually in Tennessee, but these questions will never wear me out because I love to follow with the statement, "it's the only four year undergraduate university affiliated with the Episcopal Church." I mean, how awesome is that? Many are excited about my future next year, especially current students, alumni, and families with children who attend. Reverend Andrew has already given me much of the lowdown on the school-the other day he finished of an email with the school's shortened motto, YSR, meaning yea, Sewanee's right.

I know going so far away to college and starting my upper educational life is going to be terrifying, but I know my similar spiritual life will make things much easier to swallow. I'll have the same worship format, the same foundation of beliefs, even a similar style of choir. The only thing that makes me nervous is that I won't have my small city. It has seen me grow and mature, it has picked me up when I have fallen and taught me some of the most important lessons of my life. I don't know what I'll do without it next year. I have a hope, however, that God's light is not only shed here. I hope the prayerful existence of my new family will also shroud me in comfort when I need it most, and that it will continue to drive me to live a prayerful existence.