



Youth Sunday



Commentary by
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and Gabby Whitehurst

May 5, 2019
Youth Sunday
The Third Sunday of Easter
Silver Spring, Maryland

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Commentary on Acts 9:1-6

Good morning! My name is Virginia Brown. I am a senior at Bethesda-Chevy Chase high school and I have been a member of Grace church since I was born. Faith and the church community have always been an integral part of my life, but it wasn't until recently that I started questioning what it meant to be faithful and how to carry out my faith in my day to day life.

In today's first lesson, from Acts, Saul finds himself rethinking his own faith when he encounters the Lord, who questions why Saul is persecuting his disciples. The Lord makes his love known in Saul's life. He invites Saul into the city of Damascus and instead of punishing Saul for "breathing threats and murder against the disciples," the Lord forgives him.

I found myself in a similar situation earlier this spring when a group of boys in the International Baccalaureate program at my school created a list ranking 18 of the senior girls in the program based on their physical appearances. I was on that list, and initially I was incredibly angry. I was friends with many of the boys who created the list, and it felt like a betrayal to me that they would overlook that and reduce me to a single number.

The other 17 girls on the list and I went to our school administration to try and seek punishment for the boys, because similar incidents had happened before, and we wanted to put a stop to them once and for all. Administration was limited in what they could do because of fear of legal repercussions from the boys families, so the burden was placed on us to take action.

Although we initially wanted to punish the boys and make them feel the weight of their actions, we decided that wouldn't be the most productive solution. As a group, we decided we would hold a meeting of all 70 seniors in the IB program, even those who neither created nor were on the list, to discuss how it impacted each of us, why incidents like this are unacceptable and how to move forward as a program.

It took a great deal of forgiveness to be able to sit down face-to-face with a group of people who hurt you in such a tangible way, but being able to teach them a life lesson about the detriment of their misogyny was much more valuable.

It was in this moment that I came to understand what my faith meant to me. It was more than just believing in God or coming to church every Sunday (or at least the ones when I have to acolyte). It means forgiveness and compassion. It means making the word of God known in your own life and much like in today's lesson, it means forgiving even those who hurt you.

Commentary on Psalm 30

My name is Meg Safford. I am a senior at Rockville High School. My mother, brother and I have been at Grace for seven years now. Youth group has been a part of my experience from the very beginning. This is my seventh and final year of youth group, and, despite the changing membership as seniors graduate and new youth arrive, I have always felt like there is a place for me when I need there to be. I remember my first year, sitting with Katie and Ruby on the bus to New York for the Nightwatch trip. And of course, I remember this last year, ice skating as Hannah tried to explain to me the plot of Supernatural. I've loved being in youth group. I've loved painting faces at the pancake supper, reading for the Christmas pageant and Youth Sunday. I've loved the trips we've taken in the van, to help with the Good Samaritan Ministries Christmas party and to visit the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial together. We've learned about the civil rights movement from the Wade in the Water ministry. We've learned about the church and its customs and their meanings. Throughout all of this, I've gone from being one of the youngest people to being one of the oldest. Though I will soon be away at college, my experiences here will remain with me. God is present in all of my life, and youth group has helped me to realize that.

I think it's also important to mention, though, the role that female leadership has played in my life. At the church I attended from infancy to late elementary school, women played a limited role in the services. My CCD teachers were often women, but all of the priests were men. I was never explicitly told that because I was a girl I could not achieve as much, but there was still that subtle, unconscious implication that girls deal with in so many parts of their day-to-day lives, the implication that they are weaker or somehow less worthy. When we first came to Grace, I met Reverend Lael and Reverend Michelle. Then, after Reverend Lael left, I met Reverend Amanda. On top of this, we have had female seminarians, and I have met a number of other female priests on retreats and youth activities. The Episcopal Church has shown me that God can be just as much in my life as in those of my male counterparts. I know that God loves each and every one of us, but it is so much easier to feel that I am loved when I know that this equality extends to the community and the leadership.

The psalm for today says "I will exalt you, O Lord, because you have lifted me up...". It is at Grace that I have found my true faith. I may have been here for less than half of my life, but I know that Grace has helped me become the person that I am today. The Lord has lifted me up, and has done so through everyone here. The Lord has lifted me up through my fellow youth, in whom I have found true friends. He has lifted me up through my friends' families, with their constant love and support. He has lifted me up through our clergy, especially Reverend Amanda, and through the adults who have served as mentors for me in my time here, especially Marnie Brown. Grace Church will always hold a special place in my heart, no matter where I end up in life. Thank you, everyone, for making this church what it is.

Commentary on John 21:1-9

My name is Gabby Whitehurst. I'm a senior at Albert Einstein High School. I think that most people here have spent time trying to understand God, fearing, resenting, questioning, and ignoring God. And every time I think I've come to some logical conclusion on religion, something always seems to change it, or I always seem to have a different revelation.

When Reverend Amanda first gave us the readings for this service she gave us some prompts to help us because we hadn't ever delivered a sermon before. When I started thinking about how I should start to write this sermon, I thought that maybe I should revisit these prompts.

The first was some general advice, to think and reflect on your experience at Grace. Thinking about my time at Grace, one thing really popped out at me: the music.

I started off here putting in work in the chime choir, then marching around the undercroft for Mardi Gras. Shout out to Mr. C, because a lot of things run together for me but I could never forget singing "This Little Babe" on repeat when the power went out during choir practice, Mr. C banging on the piano, lit by a single candle.

Reverend Amanda's second piece of advice was, since the Gospel addressed Jesus appearing to his disciples, one idea was to consider, "How has God made an appearance in your life?"

I'm reading a book in English class called *The God of Small Things*, in which, if you haven't read it, one of the main motifs is the significance of the smaller things in life, as the title suggests. There's a lot of focus on detail and surroundings -- color, nature -- and I'm sure I'm not the only one who sees God's presence in the sunrise and sunset in the clouds, people walking their dogs, thunderstorms, in the little things. They are things that are not necessarily good or bad, even ambivalent. They often don't exist to serve us but they move us.

I think that the Arts, particularly music have these moving qualities; that is why we sing at church. The best way to grapple with something that cannot be understood by the mind is to have that feeling encapsulate us, to experience it with more than our mind.

Today the gospel to me is about recognizing God. Jesus showed himself and the disciples did not recognize him, so it's important to be present in and listen to moments you might not recognize: The Surreal moments. The times that transcend time. The stories behind each note of a song. I remember a few months ago when the Children's Choir sang Adonai Adonenu; it was so haunting that I saved the bulletin and looked of the song when I got home. It's of it on Apple music library now. And I'll take that with me.

When my mom lectures me, she usually says something like, “If you take anything away from this, it’s this...” And that’s how I feel about the music at Grace, it’s my big takeaway, trusting in your experiences, rather than trying to understand and dissect. Feel things wholeheartedly and allow yourself to be moved.