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## *The Squirrel and the Log*

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**A Sermon by McCauley Massie  
preached on Youth Sunday**

Either you love it or you hate it. You started off with building blocks. Then, after many years of schooling you built a grand tower of knowledge. Well, hopefully.

For some it was easy. For others it was hard. For a few it was nearly impossible. Am I talking about calculus? No. Chemical lab experiments? No, again. Harper Lee's classic, "To Kill a Mocking Bird?" Not even close. These subjects are immensely important. Yet they fall second to one subject—grammar.

Grammar is a system so important to human communication that without it, it would be difficult to speak to one another. You may have loved it or you might have struggled as I did. *School House Rock* could only do so much in the mind of a young and helplessly confused McCauley. During the course of my academic journey I have feared grammar.

Yet grammar remains all around us; it is simply unavoidable. Nouns and verbs are the "building blocks," surrounded by an adjective or two. Luckily I figured out the difference between these parts of speech by the time the S.A.T. rolled around. I have come to realize that language is actually art. Pretty words that make beautiful phrases are the direct result of grammar. Because of grammar, poetry is not just understandable—it can be awe-inspiring.

The Bible is no different. Grammar is everywhere. "God," a noun, is used 4674 times. The verb "made" is used 1422 times. "Good," an adjective, is used 906 times. The parts of speech continue, and the Bible contains each and every one of them.

What really makes me think are the prepositional phrases in the Bible. You remember the squirrel and the log and how anything a squirrel can do to a log counts as a preposition? Well, these prepositions abound in the Bible, especially relating to God. God is either above us, or beside us, even within us. Personally, I used to think of prepositions as merely setting the scene for the story. I have come to realize that the location of God is key.

A God "above us" is one that can be seen in much of pre-Renaissance and Renaissance art. If you walk into the Sistine Chapel you will see Michelangelo's interpretation of God above us in *The Creation of Adam*. The preposition, "above," translates into God the Father. An all-knowing, all-powerful God that should be feared and loved. In my mind, this God watches over his people like a mother watches her sleeping baby. God does this with love and hope.

A God "beside us" is represented through Jesus, and he too is depicted in art. Da Vinci's "Last Supper" beautifully details Jesus next to his fellow disciples. The preposition "beside" in the Bible represents the man who fed 5,000 and turned water into wine. God beside us is the person who wore sandals in the desert. This God beside us is not just God, but also human—walking beside us.

Once again, using those lovely prepositions, God can be "within us." God exists as the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we think of people speaking in tongues when the Holy Spirit fills them with God's power and glory. We also can be moved by the Holy

Spirit. The preposition "within" has so much meaning in the Christian faith. We seek to have God constantly within us. Who knew a simple part of speech, like a preposition, had so much meaning?

Over time, I have neglected God "beside me" and "within me." I have put most of my energy into thinking about God "above me." And I realize this is a huge mistake. All three of these expressions of God are equally important. Maybe we should go back to elementary school and re-learn the importance of grammar. Just by looking at prepositions we can learn so much about God. God is like the squirrel, and we are the log. God is not only "above us", but God is constantly "within us" and "beside us." If a squirrel can do all of these things, God most certainly can.

Though I see God as mostly above, there have been times when God has been revealed within me, and beside me. When I was eight years old God came in the form of a little boy named Patrick. Whenever I realize that I am forgetting that God is everywhere, I remember a particular summer morning.

Patrick was born with cerebral palsy in 1999. I'm not going to get into the neuroscience of cerebral palsy. Patrick is high-functioning and equipped with full intellectual capability, but his speech was affected by cerebral palsy. After sitting down in Music at Camp Peaches, a familiar tune came on: "The Wheels on the Bus Go 'Round and 'Round". Sitting beside me the proudest and loudest voice began. Patrick was singing, "The Wheels on the Bus Go 'Round and 'Round." His words were clear. His lips were smiling. His heart was swelling with joy. Mine would be, too, in a matter of moments. At first I was dumbfounded, wondering how Patrick could sing in such an incredible manner with his debilitating condition. I was witnessing God before me.

The simple preposition "before" reminds me that God is everywhere. In the lesson today Peter says: "I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand." I think this is Peter's call for us not to only think of God as above us. The problem with thinking God as only above us is that we forget Jesus and the Holy Spirit around us and within us.

Peter is actually using a quotation from David, King of the Israelites, Psalm 16. King David was warning his people about a coming event. He was urging us to prepare for the coming of Jesus and to always look for the Lord "before us." He had faith that God's Son was coming soon. And by giving his own testimony about seeing the Lord, he was appealing to future generations to look for the Lord and maybe they would even see Jesus of Nazareth. Peter is calling us to do the same: always look for the lord before you and you will see God.

In the Gospel today Thomas questioned that Jesus had come back from the dead. Thomas not only questioned Jesus, but the disciples who loved Jesus as well. But somehow, despite the word of his fellow disciples, Thomas did not believe that such a miracle had happened. Thomas goes even further, saying the infamous words: "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hand, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

In this instance, I believe that God was behind Thomas. A God "behind us," is a God not usually depicted in art, but quite frequently in the Bible. To me, this is a God who is watching our earthy actions""holy and sinful alike. Because God was behind Thomas, and Thomas could not see God or feel the scars on God's hands, Thomas doubted God. I think this is a message for us to have faith, even when God is not before us, but even, even when he is behind us.

The story does not end there. Despite all that had happened, Jesus came back to Thomas again. "Peace be with you" He says. Because Jesus so loved Thomas, He came back for Thomas to believe.

As grammar can teach us, God is always there, but as logs, it may be more difficult at times to see God. My moment with Patrick remains as vivid as a Kodak snapshot even though almost ten years have passed. And while I may forget a grammar rule here and there, I will never forget Patrick. He reminds me that God is not only above us, but beside, within, before, and behind us, and in every other imaginable place.

In a few minutes we are going to say the Nicene Creed. Some of us have recited this creed hundreds of times. But I ask that we look carefully at each beautiful stanza, full of grammar. Let us remember that God is above us as Father, beside us as Son, within us as Holy Spirit. The Nicene Creed is our weekly reminder that God is not only above us, but everywhere.

Amen.

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