
Youth Sunday Sermon by Avery Culp

A sermon by Avery Culp
Easter 3 – Year C

Good morning everyone. I'm so excited and honored to be speaking to all of you today because this church has been such an important part of my life: I have grown in my faith and as a person because of the community I have experienced here. But unfortunately, my time as a youth at the Cathedral is coming to a close soon. In fact, a lot of things are coming to a close because I am graduating.

Even though my senior year has been fun, it has been busy and stressful and even hectic at times. Throughout high school, church has been a restoring force of calm in my week. But one thing I have struggle with this year is being able to carry that peace into my week. I feel my faith grow whenever I am at church, but I don't want that growth to be isolated within a certain time of the week or just this building. Outside of church, I have not tended to my faith as I should because I feel I have *let* other things take precedence over my faith.

There have been so many things that are grabbing for my attention this year, I have struggled to turn to Jesus when my life has felt chaotic. When things are not going to plan, I find myself clinging harder to my schedule, I find myself seeking control over God's will, over God's peace. And when I do this, when I ignore my relationship with God because I feel I am too busy, I find myself denying God's place in my life. These denials are unintentional and almost subconscious; it goes against my instincts to trust God over my own ability, to seek faith over predictability in my life. It is in these struggles and denials that I see myself in Peter. But it is also in Peter and in this Gospel that I find hope.

In this Gospel, we see Peter, a disciple who jumps into the water with enthusiasm as soon as he hears Christ is on the shore. But earlier, in John 18, we see Peter at his weakest point, denying his relationship to Jesus three times. Peter is impulsive yet hesitant, enthusiastic yet reserved at all the wrong moments. Above all, he is inconsistent, and for that reason he is relatable. Because while I love Jesus, I too easily deny my faith. These denials are far less dramatic than Peter's, but they are denials nonetheless.

But this Gospel and Peter's story do not end in denial and so I know my story will not end in it either. After Peter and the other disciples have reached the shore, Jesus asks Peter three times, "Do you love me?" In these simple questions, Jesus acknowledges Peter's mistakes and gives him an opportunity to move on from his weakness and reaffirm their relationship. Each of these questions is followed by a simple request; Jesus asks Peter, "Tend my sheep." In these commands, Jesus, our good shepherd, challenges and puts his own faith in Peter, even though Peter doesn't deserve it. Jesus is saying: I believe in you, you have a purpose and a future with me despite your shortcomings.

I am sure Peter is simultaneously honored and daunted by the responsibility of these commands. After Jesus' ascension, Peter will enter a new and unfamiliar chapter in his faith. I can imagine Peter thinking "Lord, I have struggled so much with my faith even when you have been physically present, how will I do this on my own?" Next year I feel I am entering a new chapter in my faith too, I won't have my Cathedral community with me every week, and like Peter I am going to need to take more responsibility than I have before in my faith to keep it strong, to keep it growing. I am nervous, but I have learned from Peter that I cannot deny my faith just because I am scared of being uncomfortable. And if I learn from Peter's weak moments in faith, I can also learn from his strong moments, and take his advice when he says, "Cast all your anxiety

on the Lord because he cares for you.”

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