
Youth Sunday Sermon – Sophie Latz

A sermon by Sophie Latz
Youth Sunday – The Seventh Sunday of Easter, Year B

Hello! My name is Sophie Latz. I'm a graduating senior from The Westminster Schools and next year I'll be studying and rowing crew at MIT. Today, I want to talk to you all about how I find God in the little moments.

When I was little, going to church on Sundays meant I got to dress up in a pretty pink dress, my patent leather mary janes, little socks with ruffles on them, and a bow in my hair that matched my dress of course. I was in it for the fashion. My brother Alex and I would sit in the pews filling out the green visitor cards but not as ourselves, as yoda, princess peach, luke skywalker, Barbie, or any of our other favorite characters. Church also meant I got to spend time with my grandparents. Some of you all might know my Grandmother Cindy Pocalyko, or my Grandfather Reverend Richard Pocalyko.

Now, my grandfather didn't come every Sunday, but when he did, it meant him greeting me with "Hey Tiger!", singing hymns with him, and playing tic tac toe after communion.

In preparation for this talk, I asked my mom if I could read some of Grandad's sermons. He retired before I was born, so I never actually got to hear him preach, but one sermon in particular stood out to me. Granddad was sharing about an especially difficult summer and he said "One of the things that unites us as human beings is our common experience of loss." My grandfather passed away when I was in 8th grade. So while adjusting to the many COVID changes like online school and minimal social interaction, I was thrown into the new reality that I would have no more Sundays sitting on the far right end of the pew with Granddad, I wouldn't be greeted with "Tiger", I won't get to watch *Looney Tunes*, *Phineas and Ferb*, *Barbie Island Princess*, or *Shawn the Sheep* with Granddad at family celebrations, and I won't fulfill my childhood plans of walking down the aisle on my wedding day to find my Granddad officiating.

I always associated church with Granddad. So naturally, if I lost Granddad, I would lose church too right? Wrong. Thankfully, God never left. In fact, God was there to help fill the gaps. In my confusion and grief, I turned to Christ and to my community here at church, and oh my goodness I am so thankful that I did.

Don't get me wrong, I still love the fashion, the gorgeous dresses and seeing everyone in their Sunday best, but now, instead of creating characters on the visitor cards, I listen, I learn, and I reflect.

Previously, I think I was looking for some profound moment where God would do something magnificent and I would feel his presence, but now I understand that there's no need for grand gestures, God is everywhere, especially in the little moments. Instead of expecting a grand entrance, I now feel God's presence as I work with my grief, in the community here at St. Phillips, when I'm searching for strength, or when I'm simply outside appreciating nature.

A few weeks into the year, one Tuesday after my 10th grade chemistry class is over, I look around for someone to go to lunch with, but don't see any familiar faces. I pick up my backpack and start to head out of the room until Ellery and Ellie stop me. "Hey, you go to St. Phillips too right?" Ellery asks me. "Yeah, I do," I reply. They asked me to go to bible study that night, and I said, "sure, why not?" That one act of kindness from Ellery and Ellie turned into lifelong friendships. From getting pizza, to listening to the message Keith prepares and having meaningful discussions, and then sitting in Ellery's car for way too long after to listen to music and talk about anything and everything. This community helped me find my closest friends.

As I mentioned earlier, I'm a rower. It's not something I ever expected to do, but when a friend called me one

morning freshman year and said: "My mom's making me do rowing so you should do it too" again I said "sure, why not?" I immediately fell in love with the sport.

Although, it's not always easy. During workouts on land there's one rule, unless it's for medical reasons, you do not get off the machine. Rowing is both a mental and physical sport, so during hard pieces, it's just you and the machine with the numbers glaring back at you telling you stroke by stroke how poorly or well you're doing. It's the first 2k day of 10th grade. For the non-rowers, a 2k is *the* defining piece. The one time that decides how good you are as a rower.

"Sit ready, Attention, Row!" The piece starts, but no matter how hard I tried, I could not get the numbers to be where I needed them to be. And I did the one thing I was never supposed to do, I got off the erg. Sitting with my head between my knees struggling to breathe in all my confusion and panic I turned to God. I asked God for strength, and slowly, my breathing calmed down and I pulled myself together. Now, I ask God for strength before every piece, and I haven't gotten off the erg since.

I've learned that God doesn't appear in elaborate displays, but instead, with steadfast love, supports us in big and small moments. I feel God's presence as I take that first stroke on the water in the mornings, breaking the perfectly still water we call glass, then pausing to listen to the leaves rustling, the birds chirping, the water splashing up along the shore. I feel God in the warm rays of sunshine, in the cool breeze, in the peace of being outdoors. I feel God's presence as I acolyte and process in, standing up at the altar and hearing the beautiful choir surround me with music. I feel God's presence as I eat Felinis with the other members of youth, as I ask for strength, as I sit with my mom, sister, and grandmother on the right side of the aisle on Sundays, as we eat brunch afterwards.

When I feel God's presence, I know that my Granddad is here with me too. In that same sermon, Granddad talks about how after his dad died, he went for a drive and turned on the radio to hear the James Taylor song "Gotta To Spend a Little More Time With You" and he felt his Dad there with him. Granddad said "I will spend a little more time with you, Dad as you will with me until the day I die. Not physically, but Spiritually and Emotionally."

I spend time with Granddad spiritually and emotionally here at Church, I spend time with him when I hear the birds chirping, when I see an episode of *Phineas and Ferb*. Because the truth is, just as I didn't lose church, I didn't completely lose Granddad either. Both will stay constants in my life as I move on to the next chapter. I'll spend time with God while I'm out rowing on the Charles and I'll spend time with Granddad as I study architecture, a field he also adored. I'll stay in touch with my community here because this place is what helps me through my struggles, where I found my best friends, and where I cultivated my relationship with Christ. So I want to say thank you to my mom and my grandmother for continuing to encourage me to attend church on Sundays, thank you to Ellery and Ellie for introducing me to Bible Study, thank you to Keith for giving me so many opportunities to grow as a Christian and as a person, thank you to the priests and congregation for being such a major part of my life and my story, thank you to Granddad for loving me, and thank you to God for sustaining me through the tough times and the good times, for I wouldn't be the person I am today without my religion.

Thank you.