
Youth Sunday Sermon – Julia Russell

A sermon by Julia Russell
Youth Sunday – The Sixth Sunday of Easter

Hello! My name is Julia Russell, and I am a graduating senior at Holy Innocents Episcopal School. Next year, much to the reluctance of the biggest Georgia Bulldog I know – my father, I will be attending Georgia Tech and studying Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering.

My history here at the Cathedral has been long. It first began not with me, but with my parents. They met here – in the 20's 30's young adult group. Then they were married in this very sanctuary – right over there (*point*). They first had my older sister, Eva, and then me three years later. Eva and I were both baptized at the Cathedral, and once we were old enough, joined choristers, where we sang and rehearsed every Wednesday and Sunday.

My family has been very connected to this church for a very long time. In addition to choir, my sister and I went to Sunday school every week, and my parents even taught it too.

But, as I'm sure many of you can resonate with, everything changed after the pandemic. My family attended church over zoom, but it wasn't the same. Both my sister and I were beginning high school and middle school when the pandemic hit, and our schedules filled up. From schoolwork to club sports, we stopped coming to church as often. This stayed my new normal until 11th grade, when a friend, Mary Frances Lacey, who you will get to hear from soon, and I decided we wanted to become acolytes at church.

Coming back to church felt so new, and the first service back, it was weird. But pretty soon, that newness became familiar. I began looking forward to every other Sunday when I would get to acolyte with my friend. It felt good to go to church regularly again!

And whether or not I come to church, God is still there for me – for all of us. The world has changed so much recently, but God has remained the same. He is always there.

But, when Keith Dumke, the youth director here at the Cathedral, first approached me and asked if I wanted to take the opportunity to preach to you all today, I was scared. I didn't think I was "worthy" enough to do something like this.

But when I sat down to write this, after I read through the scripture for today, I realized that no one is expecting me to have everything figured out, or to preach the best and most philosophical sermon ever spoken.

So, today I would like to talk to y'all about one of the most important things I have learned through my time in high school.

I remember one morning, I think it was my sophomore year, just after the school year had begun, when my dad came in to say good morning to me before I left for school and he for work. Sophomore year was the first year that I felt a strong increase in my workload – I had begun taking my first AP class, and the work was a lot. So naturally, I had to start staying up later and waking up earlier to make sure I had time to get everything I needed to do done.

Coincidentally, I had also finally started using my own alarm clock, no longer relying on my mom to wake me up each morning. With no one to drag me out of bed, and more homework than I had ever had before, it was very hard for me to get out of bed. So as a way to try and combat this, I wrote the words "Wake up and don't hit

snooze (dash) You can do hard things” on a sticky-note and stuck it on my alarm clock. This sticky note to be exact (lift sticky note).

I had randomly done this one night when I knew I needed to wake up on time the next morning, and I had had it there for a few weeks at this point. I had honestly forgotten it was there. But this morning when my dad came in to greet me, he saw the sticky-note. He cracked up when he saw it, and honestly so did I. I realized how funny it was that it was so hard for me to get out of bed that I had to have a written reminder to not hit snooze each morning when I went to turn my alarm off.

My dad seeing my sticky note had reminded me of it again, and this time my sticky-note stuck (literally and metaphorically). This reminder, “You can do hard things,” followed me into my junior year when I decided it was a good idea to take 4 AP classes while simultaneously studying for the ACT. During this time, I trusted that my hard work would all pay off one day, and that God was always watching over me. My senior year, I once again took on a hefty workload, balancing the hardest classes I have ever taken, like AP physics and Calculus (woof), with college applications and the busyness of senior year. But every time I struggled and wanted to give up, or just hit snooze one more time, I remind myself – “you can do hard things”. I once again trusted in God and knew he was always there for me through these difficult times.

I have learned that struggle and discomfort have been some of the most important and formative parts of my experiences in high school. The only way to truly grow and learn is to struggle, and face hard things.

And so, I will take this philosophy with me next year to college and beyond. I know the hardest is yet to come, but I am trying not to be scared. I know that “I can do hard things,” and that God is always watching over me, making sure that everything will work out the way it is intended to.

And next year, my life will be different. I will be working harder than I ever have before, and I know it will be difficult to find time for church. But I also know that just like before, I will always find my way back, and that God is there for me in the midst of all of the change. I know I will always return.

Before I go, I would like to extend my gratitude. First to Keith and everyone at St Phillips, for giving me the opportunity to speak in front of you all today. While I was scared at first, I am so glad Keith was able to convince me to do this and allow me to share my message. St Phillips holds a special place in my heart. I am so glad I was able to grow up here.

I would also like to thank Mary Frances. I don’t remember whose idea it was to start acolyting, but regardless, thank you. I looked forward to every Sunday we would acolyte, and I’m so glad we did this at St. Phillips together.

Alongside Mary Frances, I would also like to thank my friends for getting me through high school. Juggling all of my classes, sports after school, and everything in between wasn’t easy in the slightest, but it was my friends who helped me get through everything.

Next, I would like to thank my parents. They have raised me and my sister to be strong, smart, and capable young women and for that I am eternally grateful. I am so lucky to have such amazing parents, and I thank God every day for that.

And finally, I would like to thank you all in the congregation. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to speak to you all.

Oh... and GO JACKETS!