

Senior Sermon

Introduction

Good morning! My name is Blair Bean and I am proud to be standing before you today giving my senior sermon. I have been coming to this church since I was in kindergarten, and I can't believe that I am standing here now at 18 years old, 4 months from graduating high school-time flies!

In preparing for today, I have been thinking a lot about my time in this church. This morning, I don't want to focus on Bible stories, verses or figures. What is important to me about church is the community that exists here and how that community has become so important to me.

This semester I am taking an English class on memoir writing, in the course our teacher has been asking us to work hard on finding sensory details. These sensory details bring the setting alive for your reader and take them into the memory. As we do exercises on finding sensory details I always write the most about sights and sounds because these details always feel the most important to me. It is with this spirit that I would like to share with you my favorite sights and sounds of the church.

Sights and sounds

Sounds:

One of my favorite sounds in the whole world occurs during communion. After everyone has been served and drinks their cup of grape juice together I love the sound of people putting the cups into the racks in each pew. I'm sure you can all imagine the noise, it's a scattered plinking. I'm honestly not sure why I like that sound so much-but it makes me happy every communion Sunday.

Another favorite sound of the church is someone who I consider to be the "voice of the church". I'm not talking about Peter, or David, or Adrienne. I am talking about Susan Saunders. Over the last couple of years she has become the go to narrator and announcer for any skit or story that is going on in the service. I can honestly say that I love listening to her voice. It is so warm and it makes me feel at home.

I love watching the cherub and choragic choirs perform. My favorite performances of theirs occur when the song is a little bit silly. The congregation always seems to engage with these performances a bit more than normal. I love it when the congregation laughs a long with the kids and my absolute favorite is when the congregation applauds after the kids have finished performing. At church we generally don't applaud because perhaps people feel like the service is a time for quiet reflection. When the congregation applauds I feel like they forget for a moment that we are at church and acting serious, and they fully share their appreciation with the kids. I wish we could share that level of appreciation for each other's gifts more often.

One of my favorite memories is of Bob Lee's last service before he retired. At the time I was singing with the choragic choir and at the end of the service the choir stood up on the pulpit and the sanctuary choir lined the aisles and the balcony. Everyone had bells and we rang them as Bob left the sanctuary for the last time. I loved the sound of those bells ringing and the symbolism behind that

scene. Little did we know that he would never step foot in our church again. This fact makes those bells and that scene even more important to me.

Sights:

During Christmas time I love watching the Christmas pageant. As I've gotten older my mom hasn't always been able to come to the event, but I always find a way to get here for this special event. My favorite part of the entire pageant is the line "when suddenly...." And to everyone's great astonishment the angels "pop" up out of the bathtub. It is never a surprise, but it is always a delight to see the group of angels with their tinsel all askew.

Another favorite sight of the Christmas season is the decorations in the sanctuary. I love the Christmas tree, the candles in the windows, and the poinsettias on the windowsills and pulpit area. I also like the moment when the bright star, hung high above the Christmas tree, is lit for the first time. I feel like Christmas must be close when the star is lit and the entire sanctuary is decorated.

I can speak for many of the youth of the church when I say that I love baptisms. It is fun to watch the baby and to see the parent's reaction. My favorite part of the baptism occurs after the ceremony when the baptized child is brought through the sanctuary to meet its new church family. It's always interesting to see how they react to this situation. I like to see not only how the child reacts to the congregation, but also how the congregation reacts to the child. I love how every child is welcomed into this church with smiles and open arms.

Another one of my favorite sights occurs whenever the bell choir plays. I have always been one to turn around in my pew to watch them play the bells and in the last couple of years I have started to notice just how many people do the exact same thing. As soon as someone is old to turn and around and watch they do. And many adult members of the congregation turn around and watch as the piece is played. I love that no matter your age everyone can share in the wonder at how those musician play such beautiful music.

One of my favorite sights occurs annually during our YETS Trip. During my first YETS trip to Maine one of the chaperones brought directions for a new game for us to play. The game is called teeth. Each person assigns themselves a fruit and you take turns passing the turn from player to player. On your turn you say your fruit twice and then you say someone else's fruit twice to pass it to them. The whole time we tap our knees and clap to keep and even rhythm. So for example if I was raspberry and another youth was lime I would say:

(stand next to pulpit tap, tap, clap, clap)

Raspberry, Raspberry, lime, lime

Make sense? So here's the catch-the entire game is played without anyone showing their teeth. So it sounds more like Raspberry, raspberry, lime, lime. The rules also state that if you show your teeth the other members of the group have permission to point to you and yell teeth! While flapping their arms.

After we played this game once it has quickly become an annual tradition. We all hear laughter in our day to day lives but watching people play this game is one of my favorite memories. It gives everyone on the trip adults and students alike to be super silly and the results are hysterical. Our first

time playing the game two of the students on the trip, Maggie Elder-Conners and Keegan Black were laughing so hard that they couldn't calm down. They were doubled over trying to catch their breath and every time one of them caught their breath they would look at the other and it would start again. This game is a wonderful game to watch and play. I love seeing people step out of their comfort zone to be really goofy. This simple game always helps the group bond and instantly provides an inside joke for the rest of the week. If we are having a long day at a volunteer sight all somebody has to do is say something without showing their teeth and we all perk up a little bit.

Reflection

All of these sights and sounds, plus many more that I didn't mention, are parts of important memories for me. These are memories of my experience in the church, my experience with the people here and my experience with the church community. We are quite a community. We are a community of youth and adults, members and visitors, followers and questioners. We are a community that works on Social justice issues, we are an open and affirming community of faith, and we are a community that allows people to question their faith. Our community and the work we do together touches the lives of thousands of people each year through our mission work. I am proud to be a member of this community and I am proud of the work we do.

Conclusion

I want to thank this community for all that it has given me thus far in my life. Thank you for mentoring me, listening to me, smiling at me, and working with me throughout my life. And thank you for listening to me today.