

Libby Elder-Connors

Senior Sermon

Welcome to what may be your first Youth Sunday at the First Congregational Church of Burlington. Or second. Or third. For me, it could technically be considered my 17th, though my memory is severely lacking for the first few. That being said, when I first began to write this long awaited Senior Sermon, I was clueless on how to start. How could I really capture my time here and the monumental impact this church has had on my life. How could I, Libby Elder-Connors manage to untangle the web of memories and experiences that have centered around this church.

If I told all of my church stories, we would be here until next Youth Sunday. Personally I don't have the time for that. With the time I do have however, I am honored to share with you what I have taken away most from my life here. First of all, not only can my mother attest to me being the clingy child, but as I have been volunteering in the nursery these past four years, I can tell you that some children don't feel the need to be free from their parents for the length of a church service. I for instance, cried whenever my mother left....over the years however and with the consistent attendance my family had, I grew to accept and even thrive in the church school time. It was an integral part of my childhood to be in a safe, caring classroom setting. I was able to have that individual time to do whatever that Sunday entailed, whether that was making bread, decorating cupcakes or playing bible picture. Through the years I have been lucky to partake in an abundant collection of opportunities, ranging from church dinners and post service refreshments to volunteering through various Youth Groups.

This church has a magical way of pairing service with community, the YETS trips being prime examples of this. Two years ago, we travelled to Rhode Island focusing on hunger in communities. Making and serving a dinner at a shelter one night was not only a fulfilling and important act of service but it was really fun, and we meant a Michael Jackson impersonator, so that's gotta count for something. The service I have been able to complete is something I will never forget in this lifetime, and not only that, but I have realized the value of it and how important it is to never stop looking for the next good thing to do. To never stop helping and to always remain open to what this world has to offer.

When I think about the time I have spent here, I strive not to see the hours I may or may not have spent waiting for a certain staff member to be ready to go home, but the richness of the moments that I've been blessed with. The memories that have stood by me as I have grown up inside these walls. My time here traces back to the beginning of my existence. I have been attending this church since the day I was born. You could even claim I was in attendance when my Mother was still pregnant with me. For the entirety of my life, I have found myself in this building on Sundays, either singing in the choir, volunteering in the nursery, or enjoying coffee hour.. In my younger years I was granted the usual opportunities of church school and the various choirs, working my way through the layers of this church, putting my time into youth groups and Christmas pageants, and past Youth Sundays. And what have I gleaned from all this time? From the hours of attendance and participation? The answer to that is quite simply: a lot. Yes, I have learned various ways to complain and whine to your mother the same message of, "can we go home now?" but more importantly I have learned the values of hard work and

compassion, empathy and acceptance. As the daughter of a staff member of this church, I see first hand the incredible amounts of hard work, time, and energy that are put into bettering the church and striving to grow its messages of faith and love.

Speaking of those values, I find myself reminiscing about the shores of Acadia National Park, where we travelled three years ago on a YETS trip that focused on the environment. I remember standing on the sheer cliff edge, the ocean battering the worn rock, and thinking to myself, "This world is so big, its oceans so vast...what if I get lost in it?" I realize now though, that's what lighthouses are for. To know that there is solid ground close by, that the shore is waiting for you, so you may stand firmly once again. That's what this church is, a lighthouse. A quote by Lisa Wingate I stumbled upon seems to say it quite well saying...."What does a lighthouse do? It never moves. It cannot hike up its rocky skirt and dash into the ocean to rescue the foundering ship. It cannot calm the waters or clear the shoals. It can only cast light into the darkness. It can only point the way. Yet, through one lighthouse, you guide many ships." This building itself may not move or come running to us when we have gotten turned around, but it is solid and never fails to provide the comfort one may be seeking. Though sometimes, I have shrouded this church in the shadows of my life, it always without fail, continues to shine. It has never set out to blind me or force me into belief, instead supporting me and trusting me to develop my beliefs on my own time. I have been lucky to grow up here, to meet the extraordinary people that I have, and to know that no matter where I may be this church will always be familiar ground, always full of love and light.