

Paige Hauke – Senior Sermon 2015

I am sure most of you in the Congregation right now can remember, looking back to Christmas, a bunch of kids getting ready in costumes, excited for the Hanging of the Greens. Many, many years back, about fifteen to be exact, some of you may even remember a young girl in an angel costume. She had short cropped hair, bangs, a pug nose, and a huge smile. She got to be in the front row of the bathtub... that is what some of us call the choir loft that is behind the pulpit in our Sanctuary. The little girl was in the front row because she was so short and, if that wasn't enough, she stood out in another way. Held tightly in her arms, pressing up against her cheek, was a bright red blanket, a bright red blanket that, in the sea of white and gold, made the girl stick out like a sore thumb.

Of course, that little girl was me. Come to think of it, she still is me in many ways. Am I taller now? Absolutely. Have I learned more since then? Without a doubt. Am I more mature? I should hope so...although I guess that one is up for debate. But there is one thing that goes unchanged. Yes, my blanket no longer leaves the house, certainly does not go to church with me, but only because I have found a new blanket to hold on to, one that I can keep in my heart and grab hold of whenever I need it. It is a blanket of love and forgiveness and strength, a blanket of great light, and it is sewn by the hands of God. It keeps me warm and protects me and gets me through some of my greatest challenges. When I got my first Bible, when I sang in the choir and colored pictures of Moses and played church hangman in the red pew registers, when I cooked meals for Dismas House and traveled with YETS and played Ring Around the Rosie for half an hour with children from many countries at the Sarah Holbrook Center, in all these moments, that blanket was wrapped tight around me and there was no question that I could feel God's love.

Unfortunately, like all other blankets, this one is not infallible. There are times when it gets worn and full of holes. Sometimes, in moments of great confusion, I lose it all together. In both cases, the result is jarring. Seeing something I took such great care of in tatters, or picturing it lost on the side of

the road or overnighting at a friend's house rather than by my side makes me feel irresponsible, like maybe I never deserved to have it in the first place. The death of someone I care about, the news that resolved problems are constantly replaced by more tragedy, the overwhelming realization that I am only one person in a world of 7 billion. These things start to puncture the blanket and test my ability to continue along the same path. There are always trying times, always circumstances telling me that blankets are childish, that I should cast aside my beliefs for a more rational life.

In response to that, I have a story:

When I was in middle school, I dedicated every open thought to planning out my next Hide and Go Seek spot for church lock ins. I had always been pretty good at hiding, but I wanted to be the best. I considered every possible room, making a layout in my head to apply during the real deal. When that night came, I excitedly ran out of the chapel to the sound of the seeker counting down from one hundred. I don't quite remember why, maybe it was that I had already been found in my planned hiding space, or that it was compromised because the seeker knew about it, or because the refrigerator in the kitchen had been pushed all the way up against the wall, but after all that planning I was still unprepared. As the numbers got closer and closer to zero, I ran around looking for a solution, finally finding it in the Possibility Shop donation bin. I was thrilled with my own brilliance and dove in. Actually dove in. There was a crunch underneath me as something breakable broke, right around the same time that the seeker said "Ready or not, here I come!" My heart was pounding and I was terrified. I couldn't give myself up to the seeker, but I also needed to get out of that bin. "This game isn't worth it anymore," my mind told me, at the same time asking the thousand dollar question: "Why me?" When someone found me I was, quite frankly, relieved. By the next round, the broken pieces had been taken care of and I had used my mistake to find something better: I hid in the elevator. It might seem too obvious, but in truth, nobody even thinks to look there, and I was one of the last people found.

Now, I know in the grand scheme of things, this is nothing. But at the moment, diving into the Pos Shop bin and smashing something breakable was a hole in my blanket. Like other, bigger holes, it made me question myself and plagued me with doubt. But it also reminded me that there is a cure to holes: patches. It suggested that just because one belief doesn't work quite the way I planned, it doesn't mean there can't be something else out there, something new to cover up the hole. It also told me that these old beliefs can't be remade until they have been punctured. It makes me think that maybe there's a reason why holey and holy are such close relatives.

But this sermon needn't be all about me. After all, 2 Corinthians chapter 4 says, "Remember, our Message is not about ourselves; we're proclaiming Jesus Christ, the Master. All we are is messengers, errand runners from Jesus for you." So let the little girl be all of us. Let Hide-and-Go-Seek be the game we all play with God. And let the red blanket filled with patched up holes be the light within so much darkness. That same passage in 2 Corinthians also reminds us that "it is the God who said 'Let light shine out of darkness,' who has shone in our hearts". God does not say to obliterate the darkness. God does not tell us to have the light swallow the darkness like the whale did Jonah. No, instead the God inside each of us instructed us to "Let light shine *out* of the darkness", to make something good come of something bad.

It is not our job to eliminate the darkness. After all, it is only at night that we are able to see the stars. Rather, we must, each and every one of us, do our best to let the light shine out of the darkness. Everything else will come after. As theologian Dwight L. Moody once wrote, "We are told to let our light shine, and if it does, we won't need to tell anybody it does. Lighthouses don't fire cannons to call attention to their shining- they just shine." I have been going to this church ever since I was born, and I have not ceased to see people shining. Everyone here has the capacity for greatness. It doesn't have to be big, just great. After all, lights come in all shapes, sizes, and colors. Not one of them is alike. I thank

you for showing your unique lights to me throughout my journey, and wish you all the best in facing the darkness to keep it lit for many, many years to come. I, myself, will try to do the same.