

Senior Sermon, St. David's Episcopal Church, Graduation Sunday, 6/18/17 (Courtney Mason)

1 Corinthians 13:4-8 New International Version (NIV)

4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

8 Love never fails.

When I think about God I think about an unconditional love. A love so strong that no matter what I do or say, I'll still be able to feel it. It's a feeling of importance, of being wanted. I get that exact same feeling when I think about St. David's. When I'm here, I know that I am accepted. And I know that no matter what I do or where I go that I am loved, and I always have a place to call home.

My family and I have been attending this church for as long as I can remember. Some of my fondest memories from my childhood took place here. From vacation bible school to Mrs. Kathy's Sunday school class to playing "the floor is lava" at my dad's choir practices with the other kids, to spontaneous sheets runs and lock-ins, I was always having fun here. And I am so grateful for each and every person that influenced my growth as a Christian, more specifically as an Episcopalian, and as a person.

As some of you know, my family and I have always been heavily involved in the EYC at both St. David's and on the diocesan level. This past May Weekend, during what we call the "senior moment" as my fellow seniors and I swayed back and forth to the musical stylings of Hannah Montana, I could not help but think about how that moment signified the end of my presidency, the end of my time on EYC board, the end of my time in EYC in general, and the end of my time here at St. David's. In that moment I thought about every person and experience at St. David's that has shaped me into who I am. I thought about Kathy Love and how her class was the highlight of our Sundays when we were kids. I thought about Marti Stephens-Hartka and how I thrive to be as brilliant and poised and intelligent as she is. I thought about Carol Todd and how compassionate she is. I thought about Pastor Elizabeth and how she has influenced me in my spiritual growth over the last few years. And the list goes on and on. I am so privileged to have grown up in this community. It truly has molded me into who I am.

Colossians 3:12 states for us to "Clothe [ourselves] with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience." Here at St. David's I have witnessed these traits in each person that I encounter. Because of your compassion, because of your kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience I was able to grow firm in my faith and myself as an individual. In a speech I did at May Weekend, I described my faith journey like the life of a flower. Planting the seed is equivalent to baptism. Next the flower is nurtured and nourished, so that it can bloom fully. For me, St. David's has been that nourishment. You have helped to give me what I need to bloom fully, and now I'm in a position where I can take all of these lessons learned and apply them to the next chapter of my life.

One of my favorite poems is one written by Shane Koyczan. I've used it before in talks, but the words he uses really do tie together everything that I'd like to say quite nicely. Here it is.

“I sit before flowers hoping they will train me in the art of opening up. I stand on mountain tops believing that avalanches will teach me to let go. I know nothing, but I am here to learn.” The lessons I've learned from this incredible community will be with me for the rest of my life. I am starting a new journey where once again I know nothing, but I will learn. But I want to leave letting you all know that the relationships and experiences from this church, have taught me who I am. You all are my flowers and avalanches. So thank you for showing me God's love. Thank you for being my family. Thank you. I love you.