

YOUTH SUNDAY SERMON

By Kathryn Cook (May 15, 2011)

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus explains that he is "the gate" and in order to be saved one must follow him. Luke also references Jesus as the loving Shepherd who will seek the one sheep that goes astray until he finds it and carries it to safety. Jesus seems to acknowledge that people may stray, but in the end those who respond to His voice will return safely home, finding abundant life in Christ. This relationship with Jesus, leads us out of sin to true freedom and peace. Although life through Christ leads to the same final destination, each individual will discover their own unique pathway, through diverse experiences that define who we become and what we believe.

Einstein said "A hundred times a day I remind myself that my life depends on the labors of other men, living and dead, and that I must exert myself in order to give, in measure as I have received, and am still receiving." Einstein of course makes a very good point that we should be grateful and strive to utilize the talents and resources we have been given, and respect the contributions provided from others before us. I completely agree with Einstein's point; however, I would like to stress as well that while we can strive to work towards perfection, God does not expect us to be perfect or to repay Him for his infinite gifts; in fact, such an accomplishment would be impossible. Instead, God gives us gifts freely, having faith in us that we will grow to hear His voice and find our way.

Just as the sheep wander from the Shepherd, people will go astray from God's path. God understands this and, I believe, allows us the opportunity to make mistakes, and hopefully learn from them, and ultimately make the right decision. I have been fortunate enough to have attended this church all of my life, and I can tell you that the Saint Andrew's community embraces this sense of unconditional acceptance. Many of you have taught me over the years and supported me in a variety of ways. So you may not be surprised to hear that I have not always been the textbook definition of a perfect Christian. For example, there was the year I came to Easter Sunday in shorts, or the times I annoyed my dad during the sermon, or the times I skipped church to catch up on my sleep. Saint Andrews has always been there for me when I return, accepting me as I am. I have learned over the years that the purpose of coming to church is not to *earn* a place in heaven, but it is a way to form a better relationship with God and to reflect on what God's plan for your unique life is.

Saint Andrew's has taught me not only the importance of forming a strong relationship with God, but also the importance of respecting and embracing each other. The sense of community here is amazing, with children of all ages, new families, our older, wiser members, and even my parents and I coming together to somehow find a common ground through God's voice leading us forward. It is important to realize that while we may all appear different, we are tremendously similar. We are all working to become one with Christ and although sometimes it is hard to treat everyone the way we want to be treated, when working together

through Christ, this goal is achievable.

Having been born into the Saint Andrew's community, I have experienced many wonderful things. I was baptized here by my Godfather, Reverend Charles Joy, thus beginning my journey in life with Christ. I will never forget the many years I served as a little angel in the Christmas Pageant. While many children look forward to Christmas presents and sweets, my favorite part of the Holiday was always dressing up as an angel and walking across that big stage, always aspiring to one day become a "big" angel. And while I am not the most talented singer, I always insisted on singing in the Junior Choir each year and I want to thank Mr. Riggs for his patience and encouragement. I also attended countless years of Sunday School and while they were very informative and educational, I also had a great amount of fun. The donuts and Capri-Suns were always appreciated.

I loved making the advent wreaths every winter and for some reason they seemed to make Christmas come faster. I also enjoyed working at NEST. I will never forget the one man I met who taught me how to make my own Sudoku puzzles. As I grew older, I was finally able to serve as an Acolyte. Even given the inherent fire hazards that sometimes test my nerves, it has been a great learning experience. I have grown to lead my team alongside my brother and it's a great feeling passing on my knowledge to the younger acolytes. Through attending countless church services and listening to numerous sermons, I have learned so much and have greatly strengthened my faith. Saint Andrew's has been a great fit for my family.

My Grandpa has found his place in the Choir and I really enjoy watching him have such a great time with his singing. Both my parents have been so devoted to this church and have done a great job instilling their passions within me. My brother, while annoying at times, was definitely appreciated as he helped me learn the ropes as an acolyte. I have made many great memories at Saint Andrew's and will definitely miss this portion of my life as I graduate and begin my college experience this Fall at UVA.

The Saint Andrew's Community has helped me find the voice of Jesus and has kept me on the right path. With this guidance I will soon start a new chapter in my life and continue following God's plan for me, as each of you continue on your unique journeys. While I do not know all the turns that our pathways might take, I am confident that God will always be there for us and I will always know my way home to Saint Andrews. Thank you.