

*A sermon given by Youth Elder, Meredith Mitchell on April 20, 2008, the Fifth Sunday of Easter, at Westminster Presbyterian Church, Alexandria, Virginia.*

Good morning and welcome to Youth Sunday! It is with great pleasure that I stand before you today, giving this sermon as a sort of “last hoorah” before I make my exit off to college. As many of you may or may not know, I have grown up in Westminster. I bet that there’s even a few of you who saw me baptized, confirmed, and ordained in this very church without realizing it. Being a part of Westminster has been an amazing experience and I’m proud to be a member of a congregation that knows me so well.

But there’s a lot about me you probably don’t know. I overachieve at **everything** and I’m somewhat of a perfectionist. However, I also find that bad luck is horribly attracted to me. At times I am forced to believe that when the worst can happen to me, it often does, so you can only imagine how well those two traits combine. For these reasons, I’m known amongst my family and friends for my freak outs and minor meltdowns. My extreme personality gets the best of me at times, and it’s often hard to find God in the midst of it all.

Senior year brought on stress that I had no idea how to handle. I started the year with the attitude that I was already done with high school, which proved not to work out very well after the first week of classes. While not only having the hardest schedule I’d ever had, I was expected to perform at my best *while* applying to colleges, making sure that my applications were flawless. Combine this with clubs, sports, and of course maintaining a social life and you’ve got a recipe for disaster. During all this time my connection with God slowly started to fade. I kept coming to youth group of course and participated in my usual Presbyterian activities, but I forgot what I was doing it for. I began to lose the meaning of “**faith in God**” in its routine.

Besides just the busyness of my schedule, I did have a few major hurdles to jump. The most obvious one was making sure that I would get into college. Not only was I concerned about the quality of my applications, waiting around to see where I did, or didn’t, get in was killing me and when I did know where I got in, where would I go? I got so caught up in *perfecting* things that it was my main priority, all of my focus went to it. But luckily I had a solid group of people to bring me back to sanity. They talked me through it all and made things as easy as possible for me, and I couldn’t be more appreciative. With me here today is my family as well as my best friend and boyfriend, Ben. It’s easy to say that without them I wouldn’t be as pulled together as I am now.

My family is the best support system for me, and I’m eternally grateful for each and every one of them, but first and fore most, I need to thank my mom. She knows me better than anyone in the world. To say the least, I’ve given her a lot to deal with. As if my crazy teenage mood swings weren’t enough, she puts up with them and gives me unconditional loving and support. She’s made my lunch for me everyday since Kindergarten; she drives hours and hours to all my hockey games; she comes home early from work if I’m having an extra bad day to comfort me; she makes me warm bubbles baths and covers me in ice packs after my rugby matches; she listens to the blaring music coming from my Guitar Hero; but most importantly she doesn’t just listen to me when I talk to her, she really *hears* me and gives me honest advice. She does everything she possibly can to make my life easier, even if it makes her life harder. She’s the best influence in my life and I couldn’t ask for a better mother.

Another very important person to me is Ben. As he and I like to joke, I’m not a very “zen” person. My life is a jumble of to-do lists and schedules, while he is just about the opposite. For him, when something goes array, it’s pretty chill, no worries, life is good. But more importantly, Ben has a faith and trust in God that I couldn’t even *imagine* having before I met him. When discussing college with him, as a fellow senior he understood and respected my worries, but also gave me some key advice. If I didn’t get in somewhere, it was part of God’s plan; it simply wasn’t meant to be. After a rejection from one of my more selective schools, my confidence was shot down completely. I was still waiting to hear from my top choice, the University of Virginia, and was sure that I wouldn’t get in after my previous rejection. All Ben told me was that it was their loss, and that I had to have trust in God that it was part of His bigger plan for me. I realized he was right; there was nothing else I

could do but trust, and he was right all along because I did in fact get in to UVA and will be going there next year.

But that wasn't the only time I had to have total trust in God. In late February I participated in a blood drive at TC and felt really great about how much I was helping people. However, just a few weeks ago I received a rather unfriendly looking letter telling me that I had come up positive for one of two tests for a rather serious disease. While I *was* false positive, it was horrifying enough that I had come up positive at all. I spent the rest of the day crying my eyes out thinking about how this *would* happen to me. As an outsider, it may be easy to say, "Why freak out? You came up **false** positive, so there's nothing wrong with you," but in fact the word "positive" was enough for me to think I had a chance of being diseased. When I showed Ben the letter I received, he gave me just the kind of support I needed. He simply reminded me to trust God. He reminded me that God was looking out for me, just keeping me on my toes, and that anything that happened to me, God had a reason for. I got retested a few days later, and with a little trust, everything came out perfectly normal.

It's people like my mom and Ben who remind me that God comes to me through the people that I love too, especially when I'm having a hard time reaching out to God directly. But even sometimes when I was reaching God directly, it was only sporadically, or during a time of serious need. When I started writing this sermon, JW brought up the concept of "God in a Box," that we only call upon God when we need something from Him. The idea intrigued me, so I researched a little to find what others had said on the topic. One author from the Christian Churches of God organization worded it beautifully: "We must remember that sometimes God's answer to our prayers isn't what we are looking for, or His timing is different from ours... We must remember that God will act in the best time for the purpose He has determined... *Prayer is not a matter of forcing God to do the things we ask, but coming to God in absolute faith that what we need will be given to us.*" As Romans 8:28 says: "We know that in everything God works for good with those who love him, who are called according to his purpose." It's hard for us to remember that we can't **just** think to God when we need help, but that we should *always* trust that God will do what's *really* best for us, even if it's not what we think is best at the time.

Even though I started this year with a lost connection with God, I ended it with a rejuvenated and stronger relationship with Him than I've ever known. I have come to realize that it's so easy to grow up being told "just trust God! Everything will be fine." But when it gets down to it, it takes so much more strength to actually put all of your heart and faith into it. My family and Ben have given me that strength this year; they have come together to be my "rock and my fortress." It's taken me years to realize how amazing God is, but I feel like He has come to me through all of these wonderful people to show me just how much He cares about me and loves me.

As a congregation, we must find our way to trusting God not only by knowing and wholly trusting **Him**, but by understanding that we are never alone because He comes to us through others here on Earth so that even when we are in a time of weakness, others may give us the strength we need to find God again.