

High School Graduate Sunday Sermon **By Nathalie Matthews**

Good Morning, for those of you who don't know me, my name is Nathalie Matthews. I have been a member of Trinity since I was born almost 18 years ago. I was baptized here in the Cathedral, and have been very involved in lots of church activities ever since I could remember. Even though I have been active, and have learned a lot about the Lord from the very beginning, I did not start to fully grasp the concept of Christianity until very recently. I kept hearing the gospel and stories about Jesus and his miracles, but for the longest time, I just thought they were good stories, and didn't think that they directly affected me. My freshman year in high school, I really began to listen and really hear what God was trying to tell me. I knew that I wanted to be a Christian, but I didn't know how much responsibility I was taking on. I learned more and more as time went by, but I was full of questions, and still am. For the past 3 years, I thought I had the general idea of what being a Christian was and that I was doing well, but I felt like there was still something missing. When I was asked to do this sermon, I was very honored and knew I wanted to make it something very personal, but I was confused about what to say. I had today's gospel to read, but nothing really special in the reading spoke to me the first few times I read it. Then this Easter, I heard a speaker talk in depth about the crucifixion, but in a way I had never heard it explained. When ever I hear the Easter story, I always hear about the curtain in the temple ripping in half, from top to bottom after Jesus takes his last breath. I never understood the significance of this, but during this sermon I heard, it was described as this huge curtain, almost 60 ft. tall, and several inches thick. The curtain served as a means of separation from the people of the temple and God. The only person allowed behind the temple was the high priest, and he was only allowed behind it once a year to ask the Lord for forgiveness of everyone's sin. It would have been like if I had disobeyed my parents, and wanted to talk to them about what I had done wrong, but my next door neighbor talked to them for me. The thing I love most about my parents is that when I do something wrong, they are there to listen to what I have to say, and they listen attentively and forgive me. I can go curl up with them on the sofa in our den, and cover up with our blanket, and talk to them about anything. We have a relationship, and I can talk to them all the time, not wait once a year for someone else to talk to them for me. I always thought that the curtain tearing was just a sign for something, I wasn't sure what, or God trying to convey some message that I didn't grasp. But for the first time, I finally realized that it was symbolic for the Lord doing away with separation from him. He wants us to have a personal relationship with him, not just go to church on Sundays, pray, and then be done until the next Sunday.... He wants us to come to him with our problems, treat him how we treat our real fathers. He wanted us to be able to confess our sins personally, and explain them ourselves instead of getting a priest to do it for us. He wants us to be able to get on the sofa and curl up under a warm blanket and talk to him about our lives. The curtain being ripped in two was God's way of telling us that there was no longer a separation. We didn't have to wait for that one day in the year for someone else to ask God for our forgiveness.

I finally realized how much God wants to personalize his relationship with each of his children and be an active part of our lives. I think that John 14 proves that even further. In verses 2-3 it says "My Father's house has plenty of room; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a

place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” Jesus is saying that his father prepared a house with infinite amounts of room for all of his children, and that he wants to go prepare a place for his disciples. He does not say that there is already a place completely set and arranged for them, but that there is room for them, which makes a huge difference. I think that by Jesus saying, “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that may also be where I am”, he is showing how personal he wants his relationship to be. He wants to go and set a room, just for each disciple, especially designed for them and their needs, and then he will come back for each of them and lead them to heaven. That is a pretty powerful message, and probably the best invitation imaginable. God extends this invitation to us everyday, it is an open invitation at all times. We may RSVP “no” for years and years, but it will always be there, waiting for a “yes”. In Isaiah 30:21, it says “Whether you look to the right or the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you saying, ‘This is the way, walk in it.’” God wants us to follow him.

After finally understanding exactly how much God strives for a relationship with us, and his purpose for it to be so personal has really helped me and comforted me. Knowing that there is not a curtain separating us, and that he wants to actually prepare a room for me himself in heaven makes me want to continue on my walk with Christ. I know that it will be difficult, and that God will put obstacles in my path, but I also know that whatever challenges I face, I will face them with confidence because I know God is with me. He would not put anything in my life that was too difficult for me to handle, because I know that he wants me to be in his life, and he wants to be in mine. In verses 10-12 Jesus says to Philip, “¹⁰ Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. ¹¹ Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. ¹² Very truly I tell you, all who have faith in me will do the works I have been doing.” He means that whoever believes in him will also be vessels through which the Lord speaks to others and spreads the Word, just like he speaks through Jesus, and lives in him. So, I challenge you to stop separating yourself from God. Let him into your life. He took away the separation 2008 years ago by sending his son down to us for the sole purpose of dying, with nails through his hands and feet, on a cross, so that the curtain would come down and we could go have a conversation with God and have a real relationship. So take the invitation, tell the Lord you are coming, and do it knowing that he is waiting to prepare a place for you.