



What the Church Has Been

TEXT
Matthew 16:13–19

August 30, 2020 — Village Church Youth Sunday

Katie Hull

I consider myself so lucky to get to spend so much time at Village Church. The church has taught me many things over my time here, and some of these things I am going to share with you today.

Accepting others is one of the big things Village has taught me. That even though someone isn't your best friend, you always should accept them and be kind no matter what. You never know anyone's situation at home. Village has demonstrated this many times for me, whether it is someone new, or a member of the church who has continually come back, everyone is included in youth group games, Bible studies, small groups, and more. Acceptance is really important right now because a lot of people in the world aren't accepting others.

During this "Black Lives Matter" movement, we need to be there for each other and accept all, no matter what we look like. A lot of people are having trouble with acceptance right now, so what we can do to help those people is pray. Pray that they may find a better way to accept others with God's help. It might be hard to pray for people who we don't agree with, but I

believe that is what the world needs. And it is one of the many ways that we can take bigger steps toward God.

So what I've learned is that Village Church will always accept you. They are always gonna have a donut for you on Sunday mornings, and a spot for you on one of the couches, and I try to treat others the same way when I'm at church, and when I go home.

Another important thing that Village has taught me is that God is always there. Even when you do not think he is, he is there. And God is working through our troubles. Through COVID-19, God is there. Through the "Black Lives Matter" movement, God is there. For any other troubles you are having in your life, God is there, even when our life doesn't quite look like we want it to or like we think it should.

Village taught me this when I kept falling and losing my skis on the first day of the ski trip this year. After falling about four times, I wasn't having the best day, but I kept going because I knew God was there. Then at the end of the trip I decided to do the ski run again. This time I made it through the whole thing without falling once. That

is how I knew God was there, to guide me down that hill, and to keep going even when I was struggling.

I had to put a lot of trust in God this March when it was announced that school would be closing for the rest of the year, and that we would all have to be quarantined in our homes. I felt empty, confused, nervous, and upset. I didn't want all my activities to end, and I really didn't want to stop going to youth group. It was a really hard time for everyone, but I eventually trusted God and told myself to look on the bright side. It's been a weird, long road since the middle of March, and it feels like this year is just zooming by. But what Village has taught me, time and time again, is that God will always be there.

Even when we don't think he is. This year has been rough, but we will get through it if we trust in God

I have made so many friends and have gotten much closer to God through the church, and I can't wait to see you all again.

Jake Fay

Hi, my name is Jake Fay and I've been going to Village Church all my life. From jamming out with Kevin Dolan ev-

ery Sunday morning, to getting to go on amazing trips full of enrichment, service work, and laughter, this place has been my home for more than 17 years.

Every Sunday night we have youth group for all of the high schoolers. Out of all the fun we have singing and playing games at these meetings, I think my favorite part is small groups. Small groups are something we always do at the end of every youth group. Zach will end his talk with a few slowed words, and then he'll begin to divide us into small groups and send us to different spots around the youth wing. The talks would always pertain to the central idea of the night. Whether it be something about bettering ourselves or bettering the world around us, we always find a way to share and relate to one another.

The groups are often pretty mixed up. There is usually someone you don't know as well or someone you want to know better in your group. They typically begin with how we are all doing. Usually everyone would just say "Good" or "School is annoying," but if you were in Kevin's group, "How are you doing?" would take up about half of the time.

We would then move on to the questions, and as we progressed through them, everyone slowly becomes more comfortable with the group. It's always great to see someone who is normally more quiet, open up to everyone else. Small group time makes it easier to talk about God and explore our faith. Everyone listens to and respects one an-

other as we share our thoughts and feelings. It's a good way to meet new people and, more importantly, build a relationship with them.

In high school life, friends come and go so fast, but the friends I've made at church have always stuck with me. Even people that come up to me after hearing us sing at Sunday morning services have become people I can ask questions to and get opinions from. I am so thankful for everyone who has been a mentor, teacher, and friend to me here. And for all those friends I have made, I have the church to thank for.

Village has given me a lot: friends, faith, experience. But I think the most valuable thing the church has done for me is listened — whether it be me speaking in front of the whole church or chatting with my small group on Sunday night. This has always been a place where I am comfortable sharing. I think everyone needs that, whether it be a church, a community, or just a friend, having someone who will listen to you makes all the difference.

Jilli Foley

There are times in all of our lives that change. There's change in location, change of hairstyle, even change in perspective. If I looked at 2019 August and 2020 August on a Venn diagram, very few things would be in the middle.

On one side I would be in school with 2,000 other kids, and ordering options for my homecoming dress. And on the

other side, you would see different zip codes in my home address, and very few Snapchat memories of group gatherings and hangouts; the name Shawnee Mission East wouldn't be existent in the circle at all.

I never thought that when looking at the same month one year apart, it would look like something completely different.

Deeper into quarantine, I was talking to my dad at our kitchen counter, and he said to me, "Jilli, I am in a funk." And I was like "Dad, duh, we all are." But then when he started to elaborate, he said something most of us can relate to. He said this, "I have been on the same schedule my whole life."

He's gone to school, 8-3, then college, then work around that same time, every day. Most of us have grown up through a structured life, so the uncertainty of this time has made my dad and a lot of us a little lost.

Through my time at church, I came to a conclusion that this sort of change in my life could be looked at more in a glass-half-full kind of way.

During the Boundary Waters trip this past July, I wouldn't say everything ran smoothly. The first day I was hit in the face with a rock, blisters were already appearing from the canoe paddles after 20 minutes of paddling, and don't even mention that never-ending thunderstorm. I was terrified of what I had in store for that week. But that trip turned out to be the guidance I needed and wanted for my life at home.

The week unplugged, surrounded by eight people and a whole lot of trail mix, gave me a lot of time to just think and look ahead for my future. I remember just sitting in my hammock watching the sunset, realizing that God put me in this spot for a reason. He put me there to help start reconstructing my head through everything that was going on in the real world.

It's hard during this time of death and sickness, and the cancelling of schools, to think that God wanted us to handle it. But it wasn't just me who was going through it; we are *all* going through it together. This time has been scary for a lot of our world, and I think the one thing that church has brought me is the comfort of not being alone at this time.

In the times of full lockdown, I will admit I was struggling to find my path. I went through situations that made me feel forgotten by Christ. But what I didn't see until now was that God was there, pushing me out of this hole and making me stronger by doing it myself.

Deuteronomy 31:6 says, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."

God put me in these moments of fear and eeriness to motivate me and help me find that path I needed to find. He created strength by pushing me to be self-sufficient, but also created moments where I knew he was with me along the way.

Everyone this year has had hardships. People have had to go through death of loved ones, poverty, homelessness, sorrow. Kids don't have the structure from going to school every day, and the world is separating as we speak.

Instead of carrying that suffering on your back, God is pushing us to grow as a unit as we all go through this time together. He has made me reflect on my change in life and help me build that firm foundation as our futures are still foggy.

Village has not only shown me the importance of reflection and growth, but has let me build that trust in God's path for my life. Thank you.

This sermon was delivered at Village Presbyterian Church, 6641 Mission Road, Prairie Village, KS 66208.

The sermon can be read, heard or seen on the church's website: <http://www.villagepres.org/current-sermonsermon-archives.html>.