

Towson Presbyterian Church
May 12, 2019 – Gifts of Women Sunday

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1 Peter 3:13-16a and Matthew 28: 16-20

“Being a Christian in College”

When I first came to college, I had the notion of wanting to find an on-campus ministry, but I didn't have as strong of roots in my faith as I pretended when I left TPC, I felt like my faith was me standing on loose gravel, secure one direction, unbalanced and scary in other directions. I quickly fell into a group of girls who I could tell cared about me, but it was superficial, not deep relationship. We partied together, we drank together, but when it came to real life together, their friendships always left me wanting something more. Something was missing. The more I partied the farther I strayed from God, crediting a lot of my struggles to the confusion I faced in my faith in high school, and when my grandfather passed my freshman fall, that was the final straw. I put God in a tiny locked box where I thought He could no longer hurt me and threw it into the back corner of my brain, the forgotten section. God, like he does, had other plans, and his were way better than mine. He let me stumble and fall, because He was the one who gave me the care to pick myself back up again, brush myself off, start healing my wounds, and embrace me with open arms, even though I had run away. And he started, with this pretty awesome girl named Blair, who cared enough to constantly ask if I wanted to come to her campus ministry every week.

Coming back to faith wasn't easy, and neither was pursuing that faith on a college campus. Along with pursuing Jesus again and trying to find my footing, I had to also become comfortable explaining to people that I was going to a bible study on Tuesday nights, or my on campus ministry on Thursday nights instead of going out and partying like I had done in the past.

My first two instances with my campus ministry were very strange. The first night was family night, and I quickly realized that this kind of ministry was something different than anything I had ever experienced. The second week of me going was the senior send off to the group of seniors who had been serving and part of the ministry for the past year (or years). I watched as a huge group of people, most of whom I had no idea who they were, stand up and say what they were doing post-graduation, whether it was a job, some were getting married (to one another even), and those who stuck out the most to me were those walking by faith. They could have blamed not getting a job on many things, but they instead saw it as an opportunity to seek God when their life plan wasn't working out, because ultimately, we know that God has a better plan and the only real plan for our life.

The people in the ministry are what really got me though. That final night of Cru, my campus ministry, when everyone was wrapping up for the year, I was still pursued and valued as a new freshman to Cru by a woman named Rebecca. Rebecca made sure that I would come back in the fall, by consistently texting me to remind throughout the summer, and sending me bible verses and reminders to pursue my own relationship with God. For the first time that summer, I tried tackling the doubt that I had pent up about God. I opened that bible that I got myself in

2013, and I really thought to myself, I want answers. I want to know this God that everyone says is so great, because my view is struggling is right now. And that is what I did. I started reading. And what I learned is that there is a good, and powerful God who loves me a lot, despite all the crazy things that life throws at you. It was there I began to understand the message of the gospel. The power in the fact that God had sent his one and only son to humble himself as a human, die on the cross for our sins, all so that we could have a relationship with God. Nobody had ever explained that to me before. The crazy that was thrown in my life didn't stop when I understood the true power of the gospel. The summer leading into sophomore year, my roommate's boyfriend, and friend of mine passed away in a car accident. Previously, that is something that would have sent me running from God. I had no idea how to handle that kind of situation. But what was different about this time, is that I had God, the most powerful being in the universe to turn to this time, and it was astounding how much difference that made.

Coming back in the fall, I had a new desire for God. I still had a lot of my doubts, but I was willing to work through them this time instead of ignoring them and shoving them aside. And the people I met freshman year began becoming a bigger part of my life, and a bigger part of my story. These friends, they were different than the girls that I associated myself with my freshman year. They were still some crazy college kids, but they were college kids rooted in something stronger than just friendship, because at the center of all their friendships was God. They pushed one another to pursue God, to ask hard questions, to read God's word. This was something that I had never experienced before, and I loved it. They welcomed me with open arms and helped guide me along my walk with God. I have never experienced guy and girl friendships like I have with them, and I would not be standing where I am today if it weren't for those friends that I have now.

Having a campus ministry and a solid group of friends who cared about me changed my perspective on college. I no longer searched for my identity in the partying and drinking, sure I still did it, but it wasn't my sole purpose anymore. I began to become more confident in my faith, no longer shying away from saying where I was truly going, excitedly expressing that I was going to my bible study or saying that I was going to Cru. God had taken a hold of my heart.

The biggest testament so far has been the past summer. I could feel all year that God was pushing something in my heart. I had been sharing my faith and pursuing my faith like never before, and I wanted more. And one day, I stumbled upon an old bookmark from 2013 that quoted Philippians 4:13. It was from my second mission trip, my first one with an organization called Next Step Ministries. In that instance, I remembered a promise I had made to myself 5 years earlier, I had promised myself that as soon as I was eligible in college, I was going to serve on a next step summer mission. Thinking about myself from all those years ago, compared to the person I was standing in Oakland Hall after one of my bible studies, I felt like a radically different person. But yet, the passion for Christ was the same as I had felt when I first accepted Jesus back in 2013. God never stops pursuing us, even when we stop pursuing him. And this was my chance to walk by faith, and truly show my trust in God. Trust is hard, and trust in God can be even harder. But man is it worth it.

It was late February when this happened, and I had thought to myself, there is no way that I could still get a position. But regardless, I felt this being on my heart, that this is what I wanted my summer to look like, serving God with my whole heart. I prayed, and I applied, and before I knew it, I had an email welcoming to Next Step's team, to serve on the Pine Ridge

Indian Reservation in South Dakota all summer long. Initially, I was insanely excited. But the more that I thought about it, the more the doubt crept in. Who was I, barely a girl who had been seriously in her faith for a year, thinking that she could go share her faith with thousands of strangers for an entire summer? I had gone sharing with Cru before, publicly declaring my faith through conversations with random people that I had met in our student union, or during my classes, but did that mean I was truly walking by faith? And what I realized through a lot of prayer and talking it through with Rebecca a lot, was that walking by faith and sharing your faith is not strictly by words. Though words are mainly what we are called to share the Gospel with, we can also share our faith through actions. And that is what Next Step was all about. It was there to do relational and construction ministry. Sharing our faith was no longer 2D to me, it gained dimension.

So, I put my faith in God, and I accepted the offer. On May 21st, I left Maryland for South Dakota, and experienced one of the most beautiful, and humbling summers of my life. I can not begin to explain the impact that the summer had on my life, but I can share some about what God has done. He showed me how to love, and how to share my faith through intentional relationships. The ways that worked on a college campus were not the same that worked on the reservation with the Lakota people. To the people there, we were outsiders. We had to build relationships before we had the chance to share Jesus. Watching and experiencing the growth between us and the Lakota was humbling. While other members of my staff team got moved around for each new week of students, I was lucky enough to be able to spend my entire summer on the same worksite. I got to watch God work through me to share the Gospel to my homeowners over the 8 weeks I was at their home, and it wasn't me always directly talking about my faith. It was intermittent with interacting with Ron about how he wanted a specific gutter to hang, asking him questions about paint colors, or sitting with Rose away from the chaos of the construction for her to teach me how to bead bracelets as she told me about her life. I cherished the moments where I got to simply live life along side Rose, sharing stories about life and faith, and being present. It was those moments, I saw God the most. Throughout the summer, I watched God work. Rose began to tell me that she and Ron had begun to pray every night before they ate dinner, and that worship music was becoming more constant in their home as they began to explore God right along side me and the students that came to serve them. And watching Rose grow even more, to where one night, about seven weeks in, Rose volunteered for the first time to pray for the meal for the night in front of 96 students and staff, along with other Lakota tribe members. God had taken a hold of her heart, and he was reckless in pursuit to show her there was more than the hurt and pain she had been through.

From Rose, I learned how much more there was to God than I ever thought was possible. He is infinite in power. And with that, he is infinite in love. I got to witness so many students walk through just one week of pursuing God without distractions, knowing full well how impactful one of these weeks could be. I also learned that sharing my faith was not just through words. It was through everything that me and my other staff members did. It was through all the 5am wake ups to make smiley faced chocolate chip pancakes on Monday mornings for the first day of worksites, it was through the late night hour and a half drives to Rapid City to get materials for the next day of work, the weekend trips to get supplies for the students coming into the groups, and leading the students out to serve the community. Ultimately, it also came down to taking the time to sit down with the students and the leaders to get to know them. We wanted to build relationships in Christ, and that's how we could further his kingdom.

Coming back to campus after summer was hard. In South Dakota, I was surrounded by everyone who all had the same background and were centered on God. Back home, on Maryland's campus, that was restricted to my group of friends and my campus ministry. But what God taught me on the Rez, as I had grown accustomed to calling it, was that there was never an opportunity where you couldn't share your faith. Starting my junior fall, I began to lead a group of freshman women in bible study. To start, I was beyond nervous to lead these women. Nowhere did I feel qualified, that I would do well in sharing my faith with these girls, but all I wanted to do was try. But God is so good. This past year, I got to share my faith with the freshman women who have come out to my group. I have watched God work in the hearts of the freshman that I lead, pushing them to pursue their own relationships with God, and watched a shy group of girls who barely spoke a word to one another in the fall become incredibly close friends and striving to push each other towards God in the spring. Three of them are even stepping out in faith to lead in their own capacity for the upcoming school year.

These girls were the cap in God showing me exactly what Matthew 28, and 1 Peter were talking about. Sharing my faith and getting excited to show everyone the love of Christ is my reason, that's why I do the things I do. And through this, I get to share, and foster a relationship between God and the freshman women and men in my bible study. I even disciple on of them, helping her grow in her relationship in Christ, as I grow right alongside her. There are so many instances in the bible that tell us to share our faith. Acts 2:42, Romans 10:14, 1 Corinthians 1:17, 2 Timothy 2:15, and 4:5. All of these are our charge to go and share our faith. And that does not mean that you need to walk out of here and start talking about Jesus to everyone that you encounter. But I encourage you, TPC, to go outside these four walls of the church, and to have Jesus be the reason behind everything you do, because that's where you can show him the best. In both your words and your actions, Jesus can be seen. So TPC, take 1 Timothy 6:16 to heart, and fight the good fight of faith, take Matthew 28 and make disciples through sharing your faith, and take 1 Peter 3:15, have Jesus be the reason for everything that you do.