

HOMILY GIVEN BY HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS

COLE YOUNGER AND JAMES DIK

YOUTH SUNDAY

June 20, 2010

James Dik:

When I was young, I focused very strongly on what organized religious institutions have done in the past. Witchcraft trials, massacres, and heretic hunts were just a few of the misdeeds I spent so much time obsessing about. This is because, I could not see past the fact that people who believed in the same things that we do, who worshipped the same faith we do, did such horrible things in the name of what they believe. These events caused me to doubt the sincerity of our faith.

Being a part of this church over the years has helped me to discover what faith is and what it can mean to me. Being involved in YPS has also given me a better idea of the modern idea of faith which involves gaining spiritual peace with yourself and helping others acquire that peace by treating them in a way that makes them see the good side of humanity. This is because that good side of humanity is where God's grace is truly present. The actions of people from bible stories who are long dead do not mean anything unless you take what they did as an example to learn how to treat others better. Also, prayers to end suffering addressed to an almighty deity or a messiah who walked on earth long ago, do not mean anything unless you take steps yourself to end that suffering. Prayers make a difference because they help us to realize what we truly want to change in the world, not because we expect God to fix our problems. In other words, you have to be the miracle that you want to happen in the world and you do that by helping others. That is why, when I go off to college, I am going to make a special effort to

protect this world we live in and to make sure that those oppressed by the darkest of human nature, receive an opportunity to see the light. I would like to thank the people in my YPS group for making church fun for me and giving me something to look forward to every Sunday night. Also for giving me the opportunity to expand my view of the divinity present within others by letting it take shape in its own way.

Faith does not depend on whether we practice a certain religion; it depends on whether or not we live up to our own choice of faith every day. It also depends on how well we see the divinity in others, regardless of their choice of faith, their social standing, or their racial identity. The openness and understanding that I find in the Glen Ridge Congregational Church (GRCC) and the groups within GRCC that I am involved with have given me free space to expand upon and develop my concept of faith, and for that, I would like to thank you all.

Cole Younger:

Good morning,

Today is a very important day for me. This marks the end of my eighteen year experience with the Glen Ridge Congregational Church. Although I know that I will be back for many more events, this is one of the last times I will be able to speak to the church. Thus, I'd like to take this time to share some of my many memories of these amazing years here. Ever since I was born we have been coming to the church. I was baptized here and I played Baby Jesus at four months old. I remember my first Sunday School classes and participating in the inaugural Star of Wonder and Way to the Cross. As I grew I got involved in the choir and I remember my first Mother's Day Musical: *Jonah and the Whale*. I think I was sailor number 7. This church has done so much for me musically that being in the choir and bell choir helped me to get over my stage fright and join the band at school. I remember going to Advent Workshop and taking far too many cookies from the cookie room. As Mrs. Lacey may remember, I also attended Pilgrim Nursery School and, on one occasion, I was sent to her room because I had organized the other students to sing the song "Clean Up" from Barney in lieu of actually cleaning up. Needless to say, Mrs. Williams was not pleased. Later on in my church experience, I joined CIA and went on numerous CROP walks and apple pickings. That early experience with service projects helped catapult me into my high school years. I became involved with SCEEP after I was confirmed and I continued to work with the church through YPS in programs like YSOP, IHN, and Fair Trade Coffee. These wonderful experiences helped shape what I am today. The church has played an enormous role in my life so far. I have experienced so many great things and I have the church family to thank for it.

I would like to thank Mrs. Lacey for her continued involvement in my entire life. I would like to thank Nancy Bigelow for introducing me to SCEEP as well as my students: Jabriel Davidson, Jerry Francois and Felix Martinez. I would like to thank Sherry Brabham, Jim O'Brien and Ben Woodworth their involvement in YPS. I thank Evan Petracca and Mr. Boyd for ushering in my confirmation. I thank Reverend Stinson and Cindy Reynolds for her constant support and her letters every time I made the honor roll. I thank Mr. and Mrs. O'Grady for their short time as my Sunday School teachers and Mr. Ogilvie for his great job in taking over the high school class.

Last but not least, I'd like to thank my family. Grammy, you have been so influential in my church life as a minister and Grandma, you have always taught me to have courage and strong sense of self. Millicent, Will, and Emery: the three of you are the best siblings to be sandwiched between in the world, and Mom and Dad, you have pushed me to do great things and made me the person I am today - I hope you're happy.

Thank you all!