

Youth Sunday sermon

May 13, 2018

by Henry Goodson

Good morning! Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Henry Goodson, and I'm a senior at Robert E. Lee High School. Now, many of you here today already knew that; in fact, many of you have known me since I was a little kid, sitting in the pew, reading the Picture Bible over and over. I have been coming to Emmanuel since I was seven years old, and now, at eighteen, I've started to realize how much of an influence this church has had on my life.

It was here that I was introduced to the idea of service, both on a local and a global level. It seems every time I go to church, we're sponsoring a new food drive for the local food pantry or collecting coats to give to needy families in our area as winter comes around. Members of our parish work with numerous charities and organizations, such as Habitat for Humanity and the Verona Food Pantry. Emmanuel is an amazing community, not only because of the fun youth events and the wonderful services, but also because it is a place where service to others is held in the highest esteem. Here, even those fun youth events involve putting together boxes for those in assisted living or grocery shopping for a family who is not as fortunate as many of us are. It's something I've always loved about this church.

Another thing that sticks out to me when I look back is that our service does not end at the edge of Augusta County. As long as I can remember, we've worked with the Haiti Collaborative to build schools and sponsor students, and every Sunday, we include the Diocese of Haiti in our prayers. Growing up, I always just thought it was something normal, but when I stop and think about it, it's not normal at all -- it's something extraordinary. Staunton is a small town in a rural area, and yet we have found a way to make a difference in a whole other country. When the earthquake devastated their country, we felt it here. The people we have worked with, corresponded with, and prayed for suddenly had their world shaken by the natural disaster. When this happened, we didn't sit idle or just send thoughts and prayers. We sent funds to help their reconstruction, and sent a mission team to go and physically help in those efforts. The Emmanuel family is one that speaks with its feet. Where we see need, we respond, be it at home or abroad.

As I've reflected on the service I've participated in here, I've realized how much it has made me who I am today. In today's world, it's easy to get caught up in all the news and feel helpless. Sometimes, when I see the news coming out of Syria, or the Sudan, or Charlottesville, or Parkland, I feel that sense of helplessness, that feeling that I am too small to make a change. It's easier to think that way sometimes. Making a difference is difficult, and it's far easier to accept the status quo.

But when I look around at this congregation, and I remember all the lessons this place and all of you have taught me, I know in my heart that standing by is not what God wants from us. We are given our talents and our will for a reason, and I've come to see using them in service to others as the highest calling. Mark 10:45 tells us, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

This fall I will be attending Gettysburg College, with the intention of studying International Affairs and Political Science. After college I plan on going into the State Department as a Foreign Service Officer, to help resolve global problems and create better relations between the US and other countries. I often worry about the career path I have chosen: what if I'm not smart enough? What if they don't take me seriously? Why do I think I can make a difference? For every worry I have, I have a memory from my time here in Emmanuel, of making a difference, no matter how small it seemed at the time. While I may worry from time to time, I know that this is the path that God has helped me choose, and it is the right one for me. I want to serve, not just in my community, but globally. I want to serve my country, just like my grandfather and my uncle, who served in the armed forces. I want to be able to use the gifts and opportunities which I have been blessed with to serve this world. I want to make this parish proud by serving our world and those in it.

To close out, I'd like to read a line from the Book of Common Prayer which

particularly resonates with me -- "Send us now into the world in peace, and grant us strength and courage to love and serve you with gladness and singleness of heart." As I head out into the world, I will carry the lessons I have learned here -- service, humility, and compassion, with me wherever I go. Emmanuel will always hold a place in my heart, and I give thanks for the wonderful, compassionate family which I am so blessed to be a part of.

Thank you.