

God's Call for Us to Change

Good morning! I've watched these online services from my home – how strange it is to be the one who is in front of the camera! For those who don't know, my name is Kayla Christofferson. I grew up in this church and it has been a place for me to grow as a Christian. I had started to discover what it truly meant to be a Christian right here when I was just in elementary school. I had since grown in my faith as I continued my schooling and now I'm getting ready to start my junior year at Coastal Carolina University where I am studying marine biology. It's a joy to be with you today.

Pastor Jeff asked me to ask you: How'd it go this past week finding little ways to act with kindness? Keep trying!

The scripture lesson I chose comes from Paul's letter to the Philippians in the second chapter, beginning with the first verse.

Listen for the word of the Lord:

Therefore if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ²then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind. ³Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.

⁵In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

⁶Who, being in very nature^[a] God,
did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;

⁷rather, he made himself nothing
by taking the very nature^[b] of a servant,
being made in human likeness.

⁸And being found in appearance as a man,
he humbled himself
by becoming obedient unto death—
even death on a cross!

⁹Therefore God exalted him to the highest place
and gave him the name that is above every name,

¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow,
in heaven and on earth and under the earth,
¹¹and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord,
to the glory of God the Father.

Thus ends the reading; may God bless our hearing of the Word.

In the past few months, we have all had to face huge changes in the way we live. From not being able to gather in person for worship services; to dealing with new challenges in the work place – with some of us even losing jobs; to being forced to switch to online schooling; to having to be socially distant from friends and family. It's been a very challenging time for sure.

In the midst of so much that feels like chaos it can be easy to forget all of the blessings we continue to have in life.

It's also easy for us to not pay attention to what God calls us to be doing, not because God isn't talking to us but rather because we are not listening to the call. Perhaps in the challenges of this pandemic we can find the opportunity to listen more intently to what God might be saying to us.

Even though my life often feels very busy, I have felt the call of God to give back to my community. One of the first outreaches I ever got involved with was through this church with Interfaith Furnishing, a local ministry that provides used furniture to people who couldn't otherwise afford it. This experience was one that helped me to begin listening for the plans God has for me. I got to see how people from a very different back ground from mine were living. We connected in a shared life and it humbled me.

This inspired me to want to give back to the community more, which led me during my middle and high school years to get involved in programs that gave me the opportunity to mentor kids regarding how to balance their school work with their need to have fun.

Three years ago I head off to begin a new chapter in my life as a college student at a medium sized university 650 miles away from home where I knew practically no one. I spent my Freshman year focused on adapting to this new life. But there was a part of me that was aware that I was not doing all that I could in response to God's call on my life.

In October of my sophomore year I was presented an opportunity that changed my life – volunteering in a program called Reach. (Reach Website Beachreachinc.org) In this program I have had the opportunity to be a mentor and teacher to the underserved youth along the Grand Strand—the community near my school in South Carolina—as they discover themselves through Christ. Most of the children that I work with are from low income families that have a very different family dynamic than what I am used to. My upbringing gave me an experience of life that is quite different than that of these beautiful children who face challenges I never had. Some have had parents who have had to spend so much time outside of the home working low-paying jobs to support their families that a lack of structure has resulted that required older siblings to step up to watch over younger siblings. Sometimes they’ve had to rely on the help of neighbors. Many of these children have had to grow up sooner than I did, taking on at an earlier age the responsibilities of providing child care, or in some instances the need to find work to supplement the income of their families. They learned early on you don’t get everything you want in life, and the necessity of thinking about what is best for the sake of their families.

Sometimes the lack of structure in their homes have made it difficult navigating school life, challenging them to rise up to do their best in spite of the obstacles they encounter on their paths. Often I have been deeply moved at how these children meet the hardships they face, and how in the process they gain tools they will put to use throughout the rest of their lives.

Reach seeks to assist these children as they meet these challenges and it has been a joy for me to see them grow through their participation in the program. The big thing we teach these kids are what we call the three Cs:

***We are committed to loving God with all our heart, soul and mind;
we are changing to become more like Jesus, and
we are connected through the community and praying for each other.***

All three of these Cs -- committed, change, and connection -- really does a great job at getting people to think what Christianity really is all about. The one that sticks out to me the most, however is the one about changing, especially in this time of darkness. During these times we really need to be thinking about who it is we are supposed to model ourselves after: Jesus.

He is our model for how we are to live -- a caring leader, mentor, and listener. Jesus did not shun those who lived out on the margins of society. He invited those who had wronged one another to

sit together with him at his table – or as we like say here at our church, to become a part of God’s great circle of love, where there’s always room for another. He taught them just as he taught the twelve disciples, inviting them to follow in his way.

Jesus was the person who was willing to call out those who were doing wrong supposedly in the name of God, and point others in the right direction. And most importantly he showed us the ultimate sacrifice of love “becoming obedient unto death” -- laying down his life on the cross for all of us.

Which is why as Christians we are called out to change and become more like Jesus in the course of our lives, as described in the scripture passage I read from the second chapter of Philippians. God is calling us to have the same mindset of Jesus in order to have loving relationships with one another. We are being asked to learn humility.

We are called to live life as a servant -- thinking about the interests of others and in this world thinking about the interest of others can often be very hard.

I don’t know about you, but before I began to seriously consider the example of Jesus, whenever I heard the word “servant” I just thought of someone who is forced to do a lot of hard and meaningless work. It didn’t seem the least bit joyful.

But through my work with Reach I’ve come to a new understanding of what it means to be a servant – one in which I have experienced a lot of joy as I have sought to serve these beautiful children.

With Jesus as my model, I began to understand that when I try to live as a servant of others that God works through me and that is a truly wonderful think to reflect upon. I feel like I am a part of something that is much bigger than myself. The creator of the whole universe has chosen to use me to share the love of Jesus and in doing so I experience joy.

Just like Pastor Jeff had given the task of finding little acts of kindness, I am going to give you all a challenge. I ask of you all to find time in your busy life to really listen to God’s call to be a servant like Jesus, and think of ways to serve those who are close to you, but also how to serve someone who you have never met. These serving moments can be something small, but meaningful, or something on a large scale.