



April 24, 2016 YOUTH SUNDAY

Youth Sunday is a special service, led entirely by the middle and high school students of our church. Youth write the prayers, liturgy, meditations and share their musical talents, in praise of our ever-loving God. For this reason, we are sharing most of the order of worship with you.

The theme of this year's Youth Sunday is God Sightings. Youth came up with this theme after their mission trip this past summer to Southern Pines, North Carolina, where they were asked to look for God in unexpected places and things. "It was easy to see God while we worked on houses and painted rooms with 400 youth from across the country. I hope you enjoy the worship service this morning, and are reminded that God is all around you ... all you have to do is look."

Call to Worship

Leader Our God has given us the ability to find Him in unexpected places.
People **Awaken us O God, and lead our hearts in praising You.**
Leader Make Your presence known to us,
People **For we often come to You feeling overwhelmed and distracted.**
Leader By dwelling in our spirits, help us spread Your everlasting love
People **God lives in us, and His love is perfected in us.**
Leader Come, let us worship God.

Opening Hymn

God You Spin the Whirling Planets

Call to Confession

Now it is time to confess our sins to the Lord. Please join us in the Prayer of Confession.

Prayer of Confession

Gracious and Loving God,
We come to You asking for forgiveness.
We stray away from your word,
 distracted by the worries and fears in our hearts.
We know that we do not deserve your everlasting love,
 but yet you continue to love us unconditionally.
We fail to trust your wisdom Lord,
 even though you are the righteous One.
You are with us no matter when, or where we are,
 but still we ignore your holy presence.
You have claimed us as your own,
 never leaving us.
Help us to see your beauty and light
 so that we may live our lives honoring you.
In your name we pray. Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Friends, God's gracious and loving spirit has forgiven you. Rejoice and be glad in the glory of God. You are forgiven. Thanks be to God.

Congregational Response

Celtic Alleluia

Passing of Peace

The passing of the peace is a response to the assurance of pardon where God reminds us that we are forgiven and loved. Today, as you pass the peace, I'd like to invite you to also introduce yourself and maybe even share a compliment about the person when you shake their hand. It can be anything that comes to mind, just something positive. Hopefully, you can brighten someone's day and be another reminder of God's awesome love. And now may the peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you...**and also with you.**

Time for Children

Where have you seen God?

Hymn 271

Many and Great, O God, Are Thy Things

Old Testament Lesson

A dramatic telling of Moses and the Burning Bush

Second Lesson

1 John 4:7-12, read from The Message

Meditation: Startle Us

Jordan Osborne

Let us pray: Startle us O Lord. Startle us with the wild improbability of what we say we believe. Startle us with the beauty of this place, and what our being here this morning represents. Amen.

This is a prayer that we have all become very accustomed to. I would bet that every member of this congregation would be able to recite this prayer perfectly at any time, and I'd like to test that right now. So please pray with me again. Startle us O Lord. Startle us with the wild improbability of what we say we believe. Startle us with the beauty of this place, and what our being here this morning represents. Amen. Nice! That was great!

In our church, First Presbyterian Church of Athens, we have two prayers. We have the Lord's Prayer and we have Dr. Doak's Prayer - at least that's what I learned in confirmation. I'm just kidding and I apologize for my poor attempt at a joke at the pulpit. I recognize that I am no Bob Googe, so I will restrain myself from trying to get any more laughs.

Prayers are awesome and praying is great, whether you are alone or in a large group. In youth group this year we have focused a lot on different types of prayer. Prayer through music, art, writing, and labyrinths. It is just remarkable that there are so many prayer options, so you can find a method that works best for you, even one that is totally nonconventional.

I particularly love prayers that are recited over and over, are locked into your memory, and can apply in various situations. These prayers are better for me because I am one of those people that get really anxious when asked to pray on the spot. It's not that I'm lazy, or don't want to pray, I just become very self-conscious and apprehensive that I won't sound intelligent enough, or respectful enough to the public. This all sounds very silly saying out loud, but I've always been like this, so I apologize to the youth group and my family for my minimal dinner prayers of, "Dear God, bless this food. Amen."

I'm not trying to be a bad example, or a careless prayer, but I panic, and that is my safe go to. So yeah, the Lord's Prayer, Dr. Doak's prayer, and the prayer we said before Wednesday night dinners when I was in elementary school are my go tos. For clarification, the Wednesday night prayer was, feel free to join in if you know it: *God of grace, sustain our bodies with this food, our hearts with true friendship, and our souls with your truth. For Christ's sake. Amen.*

The one problematic part of these prayers is that it is easy to simply repeat them monotonously, without really thinking about what you are saying.

Startle us O Lord.

- To me this is us asking for a reminder.
- A reminder to be thankful at how amazing it is to live in this world.
- A reminder that a sunny day after 40 days of flood is a blessing and a rainy day after 40 perfect days is a gift.
- A reminder that all of our individual problems and struggles can become trivial glitches when we walk in our neighbors' shoes.

Startle us with the wild improbability of what we say we believe.

- I hope everyone recognizes what a beautifully complex line this is - the improbability of what we say we believe.
- I believe that God is awesome.
- I believe that that God gave his only son to die for our sins.
- Most Christians believe these things, but so many can't imagine a God like this - One that selflessly gave the greatest gift imaginable, but we're just like, "Yup. Our God does some pretty astounding things." Almost way too casually.
- We trust completely. That is wild. Wild and wonderful.

Startle us with the beauty of this place, this congregation, our sanctuary, and what our being here this morning represents.

- Every Sunday, First Pres. is filled with so many beautiful people.
- You all come to sing, pray, and worship together and it represents your love of the Lord and your church community
- To me, being here this morning represents something else as well. It represents the end of life as I know it☺ That sounds extremely dramatic, I'm so sorry, I'm such a teenager, but I have been a part of this congregation since I was 4, became a member when I was 14, and have been a part of the youth group and its youth Sundays since the 6th grade. This meditation is most likely the last thing I will write for the youth group while in youth group. Which is crazy.
- Being here this morning represents my faith journey because I have felt the most spiritual growth through writing. I loved writing my confirmation statement of faith and being able to explain my beliefs. Being forced to put my feelings and ideas on paper in a way that other people could comprehend helped me discover I had concrete thoughts on God, our church, the benevolence we strive for, and I knew that I wanted to continue to grow.

Writing prayers has helped me develop a more personal relationship with God, whether it was a prayer of confession for youth Sunday, prayers for our mini church services on youth retreats, or simple entries in my prayer journal. My thanks and please always feel more genuine when my thoughts are completely focused on formatting my prayers onto paper.

My being here this morning represents another addition in my constantly growing faith, but also a call to you. As a youth group we call you to take ownership of your prayers, and to pray with intention, no matter how many or how few people are with you. Allow yourself to be startled by the beauty of what you say you believe.

Meditation: God Sightings Sara Cotton

"Seeing is believing," that's what I always tell myself. Christians are unique in their inherent rejection of this concept. Faith is an elusive thing that can only come from within. We don't need evidence. We don't need proof. But does that make us irrational? We are all self-aware youth and adults here. We know how to think by ourselves. Apply logic and reason to situations. We believe in science. Having faith does not make someone irrational. It makes them hopeful. It means they believe in something enough that they don't need evidence.

No one has ever seen God. We heard that in 1 John 4:12. Think about that. What a beautiful thing faith is that no Christian has seen God and yet across the world there are over 2.2 billion Christians. They come from different places and believe slightly different things but they all believe in the same, awe inspiring God. And still, no one has ever seen God.

I believe this is because of a concept known as “god sightings.” People have faith in God because they have a calling from inside, but also because they have seen his presence in their lives, and in the world.

A God Sighting is when you see something that reminds you of god’s presence. It can be something as simple as seeing someone help a stranger or seeing a beautiful landscape and appreciating God’s work. A look at the complexity of the world from the chemical composition of a molecule to the evolution of a species is not some kind of evidence that there is no God, but rather a testament to the amazing complexity that is the God we believe in.

Being Christian, being able to have God sightings is not narrow minded. It is completely opening your mind to the truths in this world that cannot be seen. To witness a god sighting you do not need to have a burning bush experience. 2 Corinthians 5:7, reads that “we walk by faith, not by sight.”

I cannot tell you a compelling anecdote about the exact time I had a “coming to Jesus moment.” That momentous revelation does not necessarily happen for every person. As a fiercely rational child, I held strong to the concept that I shouldn’t believe in things that I could not see. I struggled with the fact that 2.2 billion people believe in something no one had ever seen. But that is the beauty of it! 2.2 billion people all believe in something no one has ever seen!! Seeing is absolutely not believing. For we walk by faith, not by sight.

The experiences I’ve had through this church have opened my eyes to god sighting all around me. I joined this congregation in 2014 after attending youth events since I was in 6th grade with my best friend Jordan. (*high five*)

While I owe my introduction to the Osborne family, on my own I found a home in this church. People such as Adrian Martin or Kim Ness became and remain absolute role models in my life. The people I’ve met and the experiences I’ve had through this church affirm my belief in Christian values.

I have experienced countless god sightings and life lessons through my journey with this church. I have seen the value of fellowship during a fun Sunday night activity. I have seen the beauty of altruism when we visited the Jubilee home in Athens. The power of charity when I saw the effect this congregation has had in the city of Terrier Rouge in Haiti. And most importantly the effect that unconditional love and support can have. If I ever have a bad week I know that I can come in on Sunday night and sit down in the PIT with Kim and Jordan and talk about anything. This congregation is a place where god sightings happen every day.

I know hearing one person talk for a long time can be hard to follow sometimes- TRUST ME. So here is my 5 paragraph style conclusion to “restate my thesis in a new and fresh way” that English class has taught me so well.

What Jordan and I want you to take away from today is that you need to allow yourself to be startled. Don't go through the motions. Take the time to recognize the wild improbability of what you say you believe. And have faith. Because even if no one has ever seen God, you don't have to look far to see His amazing work...just turn to the person beside you.

Anthem *I believe, sung by Celebration Singers choir*

I believe in the sun, even when it's not shining.

I believe in love, even when I don't feel it.

I believe in God, even when God is silent.

Affirmation of Faith

In our church, the confirmands created their own faith statements based on their beliefs. May you be inspired by the words of the combined statements as you join me in saying...

We believe that God is our Father, and the creator of all, from the vast galaxies to the tiniest insects, from the tallest mountains to the dark depths of the ocean. We belong to God. We trust that He has a plan for us and loves us unconditionally. He calls us by name to serve Him and to share His glory for all to hear.

We believe that God sent Jesus to save us - to forgive everyone and everything of their sins from the past, present, and future. He did this by suffering human pain and was crucified, dead, and buried. On the third day, He ascended into Heaven, showing us that he was fully human, fully God. Jesus is a role model who we can follow. We put our trust in Jesus, live by Jesus, and talk to Jesus like he is our friend.

We believe that the Holy Spirit, as part of the Trinity, lives within us and guides us through everyday life. We believe that scripture is the Word written by humans and inspired by God. Through study and prayer, we can better understand what God intends for our lives. We believe that the Church is a family that comes together to serve God and binds us in the body of Christ.

We believe.

Prayers of the People

Good and Holy God, we give thanks for our ability to worship you every Sunday. Thank you for this wonderful church family where we are all loved for who they are. God, thanks for allowing us to be part of this loving and supportive congregation which does so much. For allowing us to get here this morning to praise you right next to our friends. You have given us a gift, and help us to be startled by the true beauty of the love that fills our church.

We give thanks God to you because of your greatness. For your undying love and infinite patience with us. For letting us walk by faith, and by believing and not seeing. We follow you through the tricky path of life because we have heard about you and believe that you are there. Startle us with the improbability of what we say we believe. Thank you for the fact that we are all here worshipping you, who we cannot see, and worshipping you together. We are startled by what our being here this morning represents. Thank you for allowing us to be startled by the things we take for granted day to day, and help us to be reminded of the magnitude of them throughout our week.

God, we give thanks to you even during hard times. Help us to grab your hand and bravely walk into the storm because you are there with us. When we are with you, problems are seen as blessings. Thank you for the people who suffer, but still manage to speak out and spread your love. Those people are examples for how we should live our lives and live through you. Merciful God, we pray that you are with those across the world whose voices cry out for comfort. Dear God, we hope that you are with them like you are for us, teaching them and protecting them. Help us to be inspired to look out for these people, and look out for them because that is what you have called us to do.

If they are lonely, help them to be comforted.
If they are sick, help their pain to be numbed.
If they are lost, help them to be found in you.

God, lift up all of those hurting around the world and help them to have peace. Wrap your arms around those for whom grief seems overwhelming.

Great and Glorious God, give us the strength to hear your voice in our lives, and walk with you through the tricky path of life. We thank you for allowing us to hear your Word today and for allowing us to be startled by your Grace. Lord we thank you for your Son, who was proof of your undying love for us, who taught us to pray saying...

Presentation of Offering

Startle us, God, into giving as faithful Christians and lead us to be more like Moses. Amen.

Offertory

instrumental ensemble of Anthem I believe

Prayer of Dedication

Dear God, We thank you for these gifts that have been given so that others may feel God, hear God, see God and know of God's amazing love. Amen.

Sending hymn

God of the Sparrow

Benediction

May you allow yourself to be startled.

Congregational Response

Seek Ye First

*Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,
And all these things shall be added unto you. Allelu, alleluia!*

*Ask and it shall be given unto you, Seek and ye shall find,
Knock and the door shall be opened unto you. Allelu, alleluia!*

Postlude