

*Disclaimer: This was meant as a speech, not to be read so there are grammatical errors*

On the Episcopal Church's website, we, Episcopalians, are described as followers of Jesus. Both our worship and our mission are in Christ's name and in Jesus, we find that the nature of God is love. We also celebrate our unity in Christ while honoring our differences, always putting the work of love, before uniformity of opinion.

Today, I just want to thank St. C's in being so true to this mission statement and giving me the spiritual strength to go out into the real world.

It all, naturally, started in Sunday school. While some of my current school friends were learning about God and frightened into obedience by stories of Jonah, Sodom and Gomorrah, Sampson, here at St. C's we were learning about Jesus' ministry and his message of unconditional love.

I have a teacher at HBA, and he told me that the bible could be divided into two sections: Law and Gospel. Don't worry; he is an Episcopalian working at a Baptist school. I don't know what Mother Giovan would do to me if I came up here and preached the word of a Baptist! But back to the Law and the Gospel, while law consists of commands like "thou shalt not kill." Gospel is what God has done, is doing, and will continue to do for us like (i.e. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son..."). Obeying the law is to obey Jesus and our Lord who is the culmination of the law. It makes our relationship stronger. But I believe that the Gospel is a far more powerful weapon against Satan and his tricks in the real world.

Now, how many of you, have ever been mad at someone else or said something bad about them. I have a brother, and a mother, and a father, and I come into contact with other people on a regular basis so it is pretty safe to say that I have been angry before. Matthew 5:21 says: "that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell." The law crushes and kills us, if you live solely by the law you will be crushed. Without the Gospel and Jesus, the bible is pretty bad news.

St. C's is a community bound together in our love of God and respect for each other's situations, talents, failings, and most of all needs. Many say that they have felt the warm love of God overcome them in their greatest time of need, telling them that everything will be all right and to have faith. For me, the time that I feel closest to God and reminded of his unconditional love has been here at St. Christopher's, during coffee hour, youth group, and up at Family Camp.

This august, my family will finally ship me off to college without a return address. I will be removed from my constant tangible support and accountability system that will certainly make my inherent human nature more apparent. Coming from a household where only an hour of television a week was once permitted, with the newfound freedom of college...I am bound to make a lot more mistakes. There is a

huge percentage of young adults who lose their faith when they go to college. I could cite one but since 98% of statistics are made up, I won't make that mistake. All I know is that over 50% of college bound Christians these days realize that all they have been taught about being a good person and being set apart from this world just isn't working for them and they abandon their faith coming to hate God in the process for setting impossible laws that they find themselves breaking time after time. After all, were they not first taught, "The wages of sin is death?" Christianity is about so much more than the shallow misconception that one must be "perfect" or "nice to people." I could become a Buddhist if that were my goal. Christianity is about learning more about our Lord, and coming to a point where we strive to abide in him.

There will definitely be days when my faith is not as strong and I won't be able to say with conviction "I love God." If disasters were to strike like in Job and I was covered in boils, my ten children were killed, and 7000 of my sheep were burned to a crisp...and God asked, "Do you love me?" I am pretty sure I would say "No! Not after you let all that happen to me! Maybe in a few days, but not now."

I will depart into the real world with knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ empowering me to confidently, albeit shamefully, come to grips with my human nature, gather up my sin, and lay it at the feet of my lord and savior Jesus Christ. It is through the love of Jesus that gives me the power to take up my cross daily even if I know I will fail just like any other day. It is through the love of Jesus that enables me to rebuild my house when the floods of this world inevitably wash it away.

The last thing it says on the Episcopal Church's website is "all are welcome to find a spiritual home in the Episcopal Church." I thank each one of you for making St. C's such a place of love and acceptance. Thank you.