

My Witness to God's Mosaic Artistry
Youth Sunday – April 14, 2013
Caldwell Presbyterian Church
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I should have known my life as a Christian would be an interesting one from the moment I was baptized - because I was baptized as a boy. You see, the minister who baptized me got a little mixed up over my name ... and I guess he just assumed.

But, believe it or not, my identity crisis didn't stop there. I later went on to star in a live nativity as Jesus Christ, himself when my father took the baby doll out of the manger and popped me in there all swaddled against the cold.

As I look back, I realize now that I was raised in what some consider "the bubble" ... until about age 12. I grew up in a conventional, moderate Presbyterian church in the Bible Belt and had attended the same small, private school since kindergarten.

I had a banker as a father and a stay-at-home mother. I went to dance three times a week and met my friends at the mall on Saturday. Sunday mornings I went to Sunday school, mostly to see my friends and complete my confirmation class - because I knew I had to. I knew there was a God and that Jesus Christ died to save us, but I hadn't the slightest idea what that truly meant. However, this all changed.

When someone's life changes drastically, they often describe this change as their life having shattered. But isn't that what a mosaic is? Just a bunch of shattered glass put together? As the different aspects of my life that I had become so accustomed to began to change and crack, I was left with a bunch of loose pieces and I didn't know how – or whether – they would ever come together again.

You see, for the five years my father was in seminary, I was bracing myself for the worst ... because I only figured that when a church did call my father as a pastor, it surely wouldn't be in Charlotte. So, I had planned it out in my head, how I would say goodbye to my best friends, my church, my school, and my city. My family and I were prepared to move somewhere like Idaho. But God thought that 2 blocks from our house was a little more sensible and we found ourselves at Caldwell.

Now my dad and I had actually been here once, months and months before the “new thing” that happened here was even taking shape. Things looked a little different then. We joined the maybe 30 people in the pews, heard Charlie MacDonald share his word with us and listened to the a children’s choir of maybe six kids take to the loft and sing. Little did I know that I had just found the mortar that would hold the little pieces of my mosaic together.

Years earlier, I had taken my first communion. I got confirmed. But what did any of that mean to me at the time? All I knew was that I was going through the motions that a Christian girl my age did. I can now look back and see the significance of all these things, but I never had experienced them in the moment. The “Miracle on 5th Street,” as some call us, has changed my relationship with God entirely.

Pre-Caldwell, my prayers sounded something like this: “Dear God, thanks for letting the sun shine and for my family. Please let me do well on my math test tomorrow. Please keep us safe. I love You, Amen.”

Now they are slightly more elaborate, slightly, because I see more of what God is up to than I once did. When my Dad was called to this church, not even a minute’s drive from my house, I began to feel that maybe there was more going on with God than I ever knew. Then, at age 13, I witnessed one of God’s miracles first-hand, the resurrection of this old church in an entirely new expression of life.

Pretty soon Caldwell House was opening and they were asking for volunteers to help get it ready for the women. Sorting through furniture in the gym was the first taste I got of what doing God’s work feels like. I was hooked. As I met so many of you while doing some form of service, experiencing your kindness and warmth, the ragged edges on some of the sharper fragments in my mosaic.

A year later, the funding had run out for our campus’ own shelter. However, in typical Caldwell fashion, funding came through just before the Christmas Eve service began, presenting me with miracle number 2.

As of today, I have seen this same miraculous last-minute salvation of Caldwell House occur at least twice more, and I hope to continue seeing it happen, as the women of Caldwell House are so special to me and this congregation.

Anyone who has walked with this church, even for a short time, knows how it feels to witness one of God's miracles here. It brings about chills and warmth, and in that moment, you spill over with pride for our church and our God. Here I've witnessed what is truly a mosaic of miracles. How could I not grow my relationship with our Lord?

I KNOW that God is doing something here, and I could not be more grateful that He has given me the chance to be here, with all of you, when it happens. He is putting the pieces together before our eyes, and I think it's going to be pretty incredible.

Now, while I clearly love my Dad's sermons, it's no secret that the Passing of the Peace is my favorite part of the service. But at first – having come from a somewhat sheltered background - our passing of the peace was a culture shock for me ... in the best way possible.

The people within this sanctuary have broken every stereotype I had. You showed me kindness, caring and the love of Christ in ways I never thought possible. Each and every one of you means a GREAT deal to me.

So ... when it comes to the passing of the peace ... I'll admit my motives for greeting you all are somewhat selfish. It is not because I want to show off my new shoes, or put up a good "preacher's daughter" façade. It's because you all heal me in a way I can't quite put into words.

Galatians 6:2 says: "Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ." Members of this congregation have taken on pieces of my mosaic that I could no longer hold, and you have graciously given me pieces of yours. We add these pieces of each other's mosaics to our own and, thus bear each other's burdens.

If you've ever been to a Caldwell dance or any of other our social functions it's no secret that we are just a big group of characters. My parents will tell you that there's nothing I love more than a good Disney movie and a good country song. But Walt himself could not have dreamed up a better group of characters. Nor could Johnny Cash have sung a range of stories like those that can be found in this church.

Memories like swing dancing with my Daddy and Rhett Brown, or rather watching as my Dad and Rhett dance at the annual dance, are simply priceless. Experiences like the Christmas dinner I shared with Beth Johnson, Johnny Frazier, Linda Sluder, and my Grandma Gwen all gathered around the table are ones I'll never forget. The man in black himself, Johnny Cash,

could not have told a better story than the legendary Jimmy Todd. And I never would have guessed that the life of someone I never had the pleasure of meeting could touch me as profoundly as that of Mitchell Marcotte.

It's absolutely clear to me that God puts these pieces in my mosaic for a reason - to see a picture I otherwise would never see so that I can live my life with a new perspective. Knowing that I have a support system and church family of this size is absolutely staggering for someone my age.

We all come from different walks of life and different patterned mosaics. Some of us carry pieces of a previous church on our mosaic, others carry shards of a time past, and some carry fragments of a broken life and bring them here.

The good news friends, as the powerful hymn goes, are that "The Potter wants to put them back together again." Though, when he does put the pieces of your life back together, it probably won't look like it did before. In fact, there may be so many new pieces, you might not even recognize the picture, at least at first. But you may find it's a more amazing image than the one you had before.

In closing, let me just say that change can be a terrifying thing. As someone who is headed off to college next year, I've learned that. The Bible verse that has come to be my favorite gives us the reassurance we need to accept the new pieces in our lives.

Joshua 1:9 proclaims: "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go."

I know that the Lord is with me every time I greet you all on Sundays. I see proof of the presence of God every time I look into the faces I have come to love ... and I will take your faces with me to college and beyond. I thank you all for giving me the life perspective I need to take with me next year ... for it is a far broader and richer perspective than the one I brought here at age 13.

My mamma's favorite line in the Broadway Musical Les Miserables is "to love another person is to see the face of God." I've never felt that to be more true than when I am walking down the center aisle of this church, and shaking your hands.

Thanks for making my own mosaic a lot more colorful, and thanks be to God.