

Third Sunday after Pentecost—Youth Sunday

June 14, 2015

Brianna Elder, parishioner

Good Morning everyone

I've sat here and watched many youth sermons over my 15 years at Holy Cross knowing eventually my day would come. And that my mom would disown me if I didn't give a sermon.

Our Gospel today is the story of the mustard seed and how it starts out almost miniscule but grows into something enormous. Matthew 13 says "that seed is the smallest of all seeds, but when it grows, it is one of the largest garden plants. It becomes big enough for the wild birds to come and build nests in its branches" When I hear the story of the mustard seed, I immediately think of Holy Cross and the growth this church has seen in the past decade and half that I've been here.

Holy Cross was founded in 1979 by 15 people. And when my mom and I started attending in 2001, the worship service was still taking place in the Parish Hall with Father John Thomas serving as the interim rector. I think one of the things that drove my mom to stay here was that she saw the overwhelming sense of community within the church, and also saw the potential for growth that Holy Cross had. I wanted to stay because, at the ripe old age of 3, I thought Father Thomas was God.

Over the past 15 years the church has grown from a tiny mustard seed into a large garden plant with branches extending all over the world. We have grown as a church in many ways – we have grown physically, numerically, and spiritually. As our size has grown so has our outreach. Our branches now extend locally, regionally—to Dungannon, Virginia, and internationally to Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. I've had the privilege of serving in our outreach programs in both Dungannon and Tanzania.

On both mission trips I have seen the transformative love that we so often talk about at church, put into practice. In Dungannon we repaired and

improved houses for the homeowners, building decks, laying tile, and repairing roofs. In Tanzania, our mission team taught school children at St. Augustine's Primary School how to use computers—and when we go back in August we will be continuing our computer program as well as adding a Christian education component along with a girl's empowerment component to our mission. It was on both of these trips that I saw how truly amazing Holy Cross is as a community.

A little church from Dunn Loring, Virginia has the ability to transform the lives of those thousands of miles away. The joy on the Tanzanian children's faces when we served them lunch was image I will never forget. It was in that moment when I realized what the power of God's love can do. It has the ability to transcend circumstances and to connect people.

In addition to growing as a community, Holy Cross has also helped to foster my own personal growth. Since I've grown up in this church I've consistently had many motherly figures helping to guide and influence me. Ms. Irick-Hacker taught me my Bible stories; Mrs. Hayes helped me in those awkward transition teenage years when I wasn't really feeling church—or anyone for that matter. Mrs. Nicholson got me involved in Vacation Bible School, and Mrs. Kardis helped me to grow into a more caring and empathetic person in Africa.

While I think it would be far reaching for me to say that God is the driving factor behind everything I do and every decision I make, I have, however, found myself making decisions based on lessons I've learned from Holy Cross. I have chosen to major in international studies at Elon University this fall as a result of my world travels, particularly to Tanzania. Had I never gone on this mission trip, I doubt that my drive to change and heal the world would be as strong as it is now. I will also be adding a Poverty and Social Justice minor so that I will be better able to understand world issues and their roots.

My 3 trips to Dungannon have introduced me to some of the most amazing people I have ever met. I also gained a new-found sense of

confidence that I had never experienced, knowing that people were entrusting me to help repair their homes. I can now say that I can handle a nail gun and circular saw as well as the next guy.

So the gospel story of the mustard seed has two different meanings for me. First the church as a whole growing into a grand bush, helping and touching people in all walks of life. The second is a more personalized story of a person starting out small, perhaps believing she doesn't have the power to change the world or touch people's lives, but then growing in a miraculous way, where she realizes that she is far more capable of enacting change and healing than she thought. And I think when done right the individuals and the church can help each other to grow.

So as I venture into the next chapter of my life I have come to a very important realization. People may leave Holy Cross, but Holy Cross never leaves them.

In the name of the Father and of the son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen