

## **Ella Chipley:**

Calvary has always been a large building block in my life. I grew up here singing with the choir, going to EYC events, and becoming a confirmed member of the church. During the worst of the covid pandemic though I dropped off, focusing more on ballet, school, and taking care of my grandmother rather than on attending church. Now you may be asking, why am I doing the senior sermon if I stopped going to church for a while. The question, "What have I done with my life?", is why I am doing the senior sermon.

Thomas and the other disciples questioned their life choices asking this question, when they were huddled in a little room hiding away from the angry crowds before Jesus came, but because Thomas was away when Jesus returned, he was doubtful of everyone's good news. I asked myself what I was doing with my life when covid began, and again as it persisted, and still again after my grandmother died. Each time I was told by others that the world would return to normal, or at least life would be manageable. The choice I made then was to cling more to dance and school and family rather than to church. I stopped going to Wednesday nights because I was dancing five days a week, I no longer went to church because of the uncertainty of the coronavirus pandemic, and I left Memphis for a while to say goodbye to my Nana. I felt some fear after Nana died, and I can imagine that perhaps the disciples felt a similar fear. They were afraid of what was to come without Jesus' support. I was more like Thomas though, uncertain if church and religion would help, so I filled the void with ballet because of my own uncertainties.

Around this time last year though I decided to stop dancing after getting the lead part in the spring production. I know what you're thinking, why stop when I'm on a role and improving with dance? The answer was that I had severe foot pain from 12 years of dance and wanted to focus more on my health and having fun with my friends in my senior year of high school, before we all go our separate ways. As my dancing journey ended and senior year drew closer, I felt that same void and sense of separation from when Covid started, asking myself again what I had done with my life up until now. I had gone to Calvary, gotten good grades while playing three sports, started going to Boys and Girls Choir with Mrs. Kristen Lench (our wonderful organist), intensely practiced dance in middle school and high school, joined EYC, went on the choir trip to England, went on EYC trips in the summers, but I eventually stopped because dance had ultimately taken up all of my spare time.

I realized that the void I had previously felt could not be filled with dance or school or anything else because it was from not being at calvary. I came to understand that I missed my friends here, missed EYC nights, missed choir, and realized that, like Thomas, I could not feel whole and secure until I regained what I was missing.

Last summer I decided to start coming back to church. Like the disciples I had found my way in the church again, starting off with a phone call to Mrs. Kristen. I called her saying that I wanted to do choir again, and then had to specify that it would be with the adults this time. Since I was doing choir more I got back into the swing of things with EYC, and even helped host Happening

this year. Through the support of coming back to church and singing in the choir I have found my peace again, just as the disciples had after seeing Jesus risen from the tomb.

### **Ella Peeples:**

Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O lord, my strength and my redeemer.

Writing a sermon is a lot like writing an essay, I've learned. Mostly in that in this, too, I procrastinated. I tell myself for as long as I can that my 'solid idea', which typically consists of roughly one complete sentence, is enough for now. And then, inevitably, I look up just before the deadline.

Some reassurance comes in knowing that I've grown up with several stellar examples in terms of sermon writers in my life here at Calvary. All signs point to this not being a massive failure so far, despite my procrastination. See? Has my little anecdotal introduction worked? Do you feel hooked?

This place has instilled in me a deep sense of faith I turn to whenever I need reassurance. Calvary has allowed me to grow up in a place where I have been endlessly supported and fiercely loved. I've lived all of my life with Calvary as a constant.

I imagine that's how the disciples felt about Jesus. I mean, just about all of them abandoned their lives, their families, their place in the world all to follow Christ. They left behind everything they had, every constant, in favor of following the son of man. He became their constant.

There's something to be said about that- about the bravery of making that decision. There's also something to be said about how lost they must have felt when Jesus was crucified. How were they meant to continue? The man they'd abandoned everything for was gone.

Just before the Easter vigil service this year, when the choir was done rehearsing and we paused for prayer, Kristin talked briefly about the notion of Easter. She pointed out that we should consider how the disciples and every follower of Jesus must have felt after he died on the cross. Their world ended. The sky went dark.

She reminded us that we get to know that Good Friday is not the end. We know Easter is coming, even when we're told Jesus has died. We know he gets resurrected. We know he comes back in glory. We see Easter come each and every year- it's a guarantee.

The disciples had no such guarantee. To them, the rug had been pulled away and they had been knocked from their feet. We learn in this week's gospel that the disciples have congregated together, locked in the upper room. Take a moment to imagine the feeling in that room. The fear, the hesitation, the tension.

There is the unspoken knowledge that it all rests in them. Jesus has left them with the task of carrying on and spreading the gospel. Imagine how monumental that task must have felt. He left some pretty big shoes to fill, that's for sure.

So they're sitting in the locked upper room, scared, and then... Jesus walks in.

Let that sink in. I feel like John kind of sells us short in the gospel, here. He says that 'the disciples rejoiced'- but I think that understates the true and all encompassing joy of this moment, and also the sinking feeling that must have come, too. Wondering how long they have with Jesus this time.

And then Thomas, to have been the only one who missed it. Being told by the other disciples that he'd missed the promised return of Jesus. That must have seemed to be either the worst prank of the century or a premise for *crushing* disappointment.

He's doubtful. I assume most of us would have been. I assume most of us *have* been, at some point. Doubt is common, after all. I know I tend to think the worst of every situation. It's a part of what so frequently leads me to procrastination: I doubt myself. My capabilities.

I feel that the message that usually comes with this gospel is something along the lines of "it's wrong to doubt God. Take the disciples at their word. Don't underestimate God." But I disagree. One of the things I treasure most about the Episcopal church and this environment I've grown up in is the way we welcome those doubts. We try to answer the questions we can, and sit with those we can't.

In the next year, my constant will go away, too. Or, rather, *I'll* go away. Calvary will be here and I'll be up in Pennsylvania. But that sense of faith will carry me through, even as I doubt. And God will give me the strength to carry on. In that, I have no doubts.