

On Being...at the Old Meeting House  
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Preached on Pentecost Sunday, 6/8/25

**I have known this place for as long as I can remember.**

The views of the mountains peeking over the horizon, the stark white church against the colors of the trees, the tall steeple with a fish on top, and the gravel path leading to the dark green painted stairs are so familiar.

**And, for years, I dreaded coming here.**

It was required that we go every Sunday and major holiday with family. Our Mom and Dad would drag us out of bed, tempting us with the smell of waffles. They would give us coloring books, to keep us from complaining. In my younger years, I went to Sunday school. I would sit on the rug, knees to my chest.

The time rolled around for the Christmas pageant, and I was an angel. Again.

Until recently, church was very routine. It was a to-do list task to check off each week to make my parents happy. I knew nobody's names, but everyone seemed to know me. We were always learning about complicated Bible things, and it wasn't fun. I sang the songs and read the psalms. Everyone repeated the word "community," but it felt like an obligation. I was just excited for the promise of a cookie at coffee hour.

When we as a group started having fun together, I fell in love with the people and this community.

There isn't an exact time when this switched, but it was more recently. In 2022-2023 we were all in confirmation class. One of my earliest fun memories in confirmation class was walking around Sodom Pond and throwing rocks at each other. My mentor Joey taught me how to be a better person.

All of us were growing into our skin, and learning to be ourselves around each other.

Last winter the leaders proposed the idea of traveling to an all black church in Philadelphia and staying for a week. The trip would consist of being immersed in their way of life, volunteering in soup kitchens, a garden, handing out food, worshiping with their congregation, and possibly sleeping in the dusty basement. I was quite apprehensive about this trip, since it seemed like there was definitely going to be tough situations and viewing poverty and unfairness of the city.

Adeline, Natalie, Emily, Joseph, Duncan, Braden and our leaders drove for 7 hours to get to Philadelphia. When we arrived at the church Salt and Light, we were all tired and sweaty, from a snot with a flat tire and a side quest to carnival rides. Together we walked into the sanctuary, with the sun shining through the stained glass wall of Jesus. The voices of exuberant singing enveloped us, and I literally felt my heart grow 3x bigger like the Grinch.

Each morning in Philly we met in the sanctuary, the morning light reflecting rainbows off the stained glass. In our pajamas, we sat on the floor and were led in a guided meditation. The main leader of Salt and Light, Jae, talked us through how to focus on our breathing. I am a pretty anxious person, and this grounding moment each morning helped me feel calm. This moment of peace in the morning was very necessary.

Every day we encountered new things. Such as trying to wrap our heads around why people without homes were shooed out of a meal place as soon as they finished. We spent lots of energy cleaning the church's shed, and trimming tomato plants, and harvesting food from the garden. We learned about how Philadelphia's own government bombed a block of homes to kill a group that was standing up to racism. Thinking back on the trip, these are the first things I remember, but there were infinitely many more situations that were so meaningful.

On one of the final mornings, the church had organized all types of food for people to come get. For free, they walked down the line. Under tents there were 10 folding tables in a row, all piled high with food and necessities. Starting with fruits and vegetables, all of which we harvested from the garden. I was in charge of handing out scallions. They moved down to choose bread and a special treat. The local stores donated these since they were close to their sell by date. Further down there were heaps of donated clothes sorted by size. Salt and Light organized this event weekly, and it majorly helped out the community. As people walked down the line, gratefulness radiated off of them, and many said "God bless."

After we came back from Philly, we all started hanging out as a group more. Emily texted our group chat and said, "Let's go out to dinner!" Natalie picked Adeline and I up and we all drove to Wayside. Going to a restaurant with eight people is usually chaotic, but being with this group, I was never worried about taking up too much space or being too loud. Duncan and Braden flicked crumpled up straw wrappers at each other, Joseph and Owen had an in depth conversation. Natalie told us girls about her latest talking stage with a boy. Our chatter and laughter echoed throughout my head, and I felt full not only from the food, but from the energy of this group.

We finished our huge plates of pancakes and bacon, and at 8 o'clock, we drove to the school parking lot for one of our new traditions. We pulled into the parking lot blasting Sweet Caroline and singing along. Darkness was setting in, and the summer air

was humid and sticky. Out of two cars all eight of us piled out, stumbling onto the pavement. Playing pickleball in the school parking lot at night has become one of my favorite Youth Group activities. Natalie had 4 paddles and we hit it back and forth or hit as far as we could and had a chaser that bring the ball back. The whole time, there was music blasting out of the open car doors and into the night. We sang along to Zac Bryan and Olivia Rodrigo, laughed till our stomachs hurt.

Then we drove out to Duncan's house in the middle of nowhere, to look at the stars. This night was one of the summer meteor shower. The sky was dark with smatterings of pinpricks of light all across it. We sat in the bed of Duncan's truck, our heads tilted up at the sky.

"There's a big one!" Joseph says, pointing in the direction of the shooting star.

"Over there!" Owen exclaimed.

Braden somehow missed every single shooting star we saw, and we all laughed at him.

"Make a wish." Adeline says.

**I wished that there would be more nights like this, with these people.**

And usually you can't say wishes out loud because then they won't come true— but mine already has.

The experiences we bonded over in Philly brought us closer to each other, and showed us new struggles in life. I learned that helping those who are struggling has a net positive impact on both parties. Youth Group has taught me that being kind is one of the greatest things you can do, as simple as smiling at someone and handing them a bag of scallions.

It is very fulfilling to surround myself with people I have fun with, who make me feel carefree and confident. Lots of people in my life have brought out the worst in me, and these people bring the best. I have felt nothing but love from this group. The leaders say, "Pass gas, not judgement." I never feel judged or self conscious in this group. We bring each other up, and make each other better. I have adapted to not worrying about what people think of me.

I began to understand that having fun is the key to my happiness. Something as simple as watching the sunset with my best friends was so enjoyable. The delicious guacamole we made on taco tuesday, dance parties, serving people pancake breakfast, our spontaneous picnics and watching the sunset. All the little things we've done together, have all added up to something big. Being with the Youth Group, I gained perspective on how to be grateful for everything around me.

In addition to the meditation exercises, Jae from Salt and Light told me something that stuck with me till today. "You can't worry and trust God at the same time". This has been ingrained in my head. It makes so much sense to overthink a situation, but trusting that the universe has your back, and only worrying about things you *can* control, is a lot healthier.

All things church related used to be a source of worry every Sunday. I never felt like I fit in with the older people, so passionate about God, and this community.

Over time, I have found community in this group of kids, with different personalities that all vibe so well together. We are a team, a friend group, and a family. With the Youth Group growing into what it has become, I experienced my heart overflow with love for this place and these people.