

The House of Hope Presbyterian Church
Frances Atmore and Sophie Stein
May 3, 2020

Youth Sunday

Frances Atmore's Meditation

As I was reading through today's passages, there was one specific section that stood out to me. It was when the apostles spent each day together in the same temple with the same people, and due to this action, or rather lack thereof, the Lord saved more and more people. I don't know about you all, but I instantly thought of our current predicament. By my completely skewed concept of time it's been at least six months in quarantine, but in actuality it's been approximately 44 days.

Now quarantine may seem like the opposite of the passage, in which people came together in large groups which encouraged others to come together in even larger groups to be saved by the Lord. But if you think about it differently, it's exactly the same. Just because we can't come together physically now does not mean we cannot come together as community and in goodwill towards all.

People constantly tell me they are sorry that my senior year was ruined, that I will never experience a senior prom or a graduation. But my class is not an ordinary class. We quickly learned how to band together and overcome challenges, and inspire others, both inside and out of our community, to do the same. And that is how we are approaching this crisis.

Freshman year started with the loss of one of my classmates. The 2016 election occurred two months later. That spring brought forth more challenges. In March we lost another one of our classmates. Soon after, many of us participated in our first ever protest, the Women's March. It was our first taste in activism and we liked it. Suddenly we had a new goal: try to save the world, to band together and fight back, and by doing so convince others to join us.

Sophomore year was quieter, we had experienced a lot but we were learning that our actions were important, no matter how big or small they seemed. Junior year, in and of itself a difficult transition, saw the loss of yet another classmate. In addition, after just a taste of activism, we started our own protest: the March for Our Lives. This time we were trying to save not only the world, but also our very own lives.

Entering Senior year we thought to ourselves that our class was cursed, we had lost friends, we had experienced adversity, we had seen our nation change. But we had banded together and we soldiered on, and our actions, we hope, inspired others, both in our communities and across the country, to do the same. In the fall we joined in multiple Climate Strikes for a Green New Deal, yet another attempt to save the world. In March we protested alongside our teachers for a fair contract that prioritized students and wouldn't let anyone slip through the cracks. For four years we banded together and stood up for ourselves, our communities, and the good of the world.

Now, at the end of all that we are facing the toughest test of our goodwill. To do the opposite of what we have been doing for four years. To not go out. To not fill the streets with our shouts. To not

physically comfort each other in trying times. But in essence, aren't we continuing to do what we have been doing for four years? By staying inside, washing our hands, and not seeing others, once again we are standing up for ourselves, our communities, and the good of the world. And we are hoping that others will join us to form a community of caring and goodwill.

So when people ask me how I feel about the end of my high school career, I have two responses. Am I sad that I will never be able to show my future family pictures from my high school graduation, or make them laugh with the stories of my "magical" senior prom? Yes.

But I think about all the things my class has experienced in the past four years, and how each one of those events has made us tougher, stronger, braver, and closer than ever before. And I smile, because we are the class that not only speaks, but takes action for what is right, and it seems perfectly fitting that our time in school ends with what is possibly the most important action, or lack thereof, that we have ever taken. Only this time we know that our self-isolation will save lives.

In addition, we have learned to be more creative. We have Zoom chats to both chat and get homework help, social distance birthday parties where we all stand at least six feet apart, and I am even hosting a virtual prom on May first. And it's not just my class. My family, along with many others, has a weekly zoom chat on Saturdays, and we facetime my sister almost every night to watch movies together. We are still coming together when we are apart, we are still there for each other, and we are still inspiring others to do the same. And if we continue this, day by day the number of people saved will grow.

Sophie Stein's Meditation:

Good morning! My name is Sophie Stein and I am a senior at Eagan High School. Throughout high school I have been involved in the Eagan band program, tennis team, Minnesota Youth Symphonies, and a variety of other activities. Next fall I will be attending the University of Wisconsin-Madison. House of Hope holds great meaning in my life. I attended preschool here and was both baptized and confirmed within this sanctuary as well. The most significant impact House of Hope has had on my life is Choir School in which I have been a chorister for the past 15 years. Through my participation in choir, I have developed a passion for music, met many close friends, traveled to Latvia, and made many cherished memories. I would like to extend a thank you to Sofia and all of the choir school family for an incredible choral experience.

In this passage from Acts, all of the people who were baptized by Peter joined in fellowship to pray, worship, and follow the teachings of the apostles. All of the believers were joined as a community by faith and in faith of salvation by Jesus Christ, together. Within Christianity there is an expectation to be an active part of the community. We celebrate, mourn, learn, and wonder together. What makes this time of isolation especially challenging is the lack of community. We are unable to seek comfort in others who share in our own uncertainty, grief, and confusion. In this unexpected and challenging time, I have found myself missing the community of House of Hope and am grateful to have the opportunity to speak and sing today.

As I mentioned previously, I have been a member of the House of Hope Choir School for the majority of my life. This past summer, I sang in the group that traveled to Latvia. Along with visiting many historical sites, consuming more dill and potatoes than I thought to be possible, as well as a run in with the transit police, our chamber choir performed concerts at various churches. We closed our concerts with the piece, *One Wish*. This piece offers a simple message of hope. "If I had one wish for

you, if I had one gift I could give, it would be peace, peace to all.” Performing this piece was touching. It was remarkable to watch the power of music. Despite not speaking the same language, it was clear our message of peace and hope was delivered through the congregation's smiles and tears. Music has the ability to bring us together with complete strangers in faith.

As I reflect on years of laughing with friends at choir school dinners, early morning rehearsals, and concerts, I cannot help but smile. The Choir School community at House of Hope has been supportive, enthusiastic, and dedicated. All of the members have driven me to not only become a better musician, but a better person. I am saddened that our time together this year has been cut short, but know that I will always have a home here in this sanctuary.

The Christmas Eve service is one of my favorite services held at House of Hope. During a season that can often be quite chaotic, I find comfort and peace in the evening worship service. The service closes with Silent Night and often on the last verse, the organ goes silent, allowing the congregation to sing together without accompaniment. The stillness of that moment, the echoing voices, and candlelight is beautiful. Standing in the pews among family, friends, fellow choristers, and even strangers gives me a great sense of the power of faith and God. Even though our faith journey's may be different, we are still able to be brought together by faith. At some moment all of our lives were touched by God. That connection we share is powerful. In this time of uncertainty and disappointment, I encourage you to be grateful for and seek comfort in our Christian community. While our House of Hope community is dispersed and finding new ways to connect, I believe that we will be together in person soon, sharing in the joy of God.

I would like to close with a verse from Numbers, which also happens to be some of my favorite lyrics from a Choir School piece. “May the Lord bless you and keep you. May he make his face shine upon you, be gracious to you. May He lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.” Thank you.