

Youth Sunday Sermon, May 16, 2010
Don Mullins and Josh Flint

Jesus prayed, “As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”

In his final prayer, before crucifixion, Jesus prayed not only for his disciples but for his whole church—past, present, and future. In essence, He was praying for Christian formation; that those who came to know Him, would change the world by not being of the world, but instead by all being one in His love. This final prayer request of Jesus—that the world may believe that God had sent Him—is one of the reasons that the youth program and, especially the annual mission trip, are so vital. We have an obligation to grow Christians and spread the love of God. On this youth Sunday, I am happy to introduce Josh Flint, one of our graduating high school seniors and a long-time member of this community who I have had the pleasure of watching grow in faith in Christ, who will share some of that journey with us.

===== beginning of Josh’s comments =====

When Mr. Mullins asked me to write a sermon for today's church service I realized that I had two problems ahead of me. The first problem was that, as a second semester senior who has already been accepted into college, I couldn't remember the last time I sat down and did a solid hour's work, let alone write an

entire speech. The second problem was the readings for the day. I needed to find a way to incorporate these two passages into my speech, so that they reflected my experience in the St. James' Youth Group. So I looked up the readings. The first reading, Acts: 16, is about jail time, so we'll just skip that one. I moved on to the second reading, and I didn't feel much better. John 17:20-26 is a confusing dialogue from Jesus to god: "I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me." It's okay, I'm not quite sure what it means either. I spent a lot of time re-reading this passage trying to and figure out what it meant, and to me, it boiled down to the value of faith, which worked out very nicely, because its easy to say that the only thing that has given me faith through my teenage years is youth group.

I came to this church in 4th grade, and when I joined, I remember counting the days until I could be a member of the youth group. I heard stories from the kids older than me about lock-ins, road-trips and festivals, and I couldn't wait to see what it was all about. When I finally joined in 6th grade, I was a scrawny, quiet, 5'8" 110 lb shy kid. Needless to say, some of that has changed. I can hardly believe who I used to be. I remember bits and pieces from my first three years. I remember going to the haunted forest in 7th grade and my first ski trip in 6th. All those years that I was by far the youngest kid in the group, it didn't seem to matter. Everyone always treated me

as one of the gang. I know this doesn't sound too impressive, but keep in mind that everyone else was a high schooler. No high school kids ever associate with middle schoolers. I am embarrassed to admit that even now I strongly dislike the middle schoolers at my school and try my hardest to never talk to them. But none of that seems to matter at youth group. Something is different here. There has to be something, something brings all of these teenagers together on a Sunday night. There had to be something special about this group that would make these kids plan their Sunday night work and essays around a two-hour religious meeting. Youth group is like its own world. There, teenage kids have no inhibitions about discussing taboos like religion, faith, and life. In fact, members of our youth group willingly return to our weekly meetings knowing that there will be at least half an hour of Bible discussion.

The spirit within youth group is strong. Nowhere else would kids be convinced to give up the first week of their summer break every year to travel to low-income communities for five days of manual labor and service. I say convince, but this isn't the case. I can say in full confidence that no one who goes on this yearly mission trip regrets it. For most of us, it is one of the most anticipated weeks of the year. In fact, I was so eager to go, Mr Mullins snuck me into my first camp a year early, so that I could work with the St.

James' members who were about to graduate – a seventh grader with 12th grade friends – nowhere else. But why would I be so eager to work for a week? When you think of American teenagers, community service is never the first thing that comes to mind.

What former workcampers will tell you about is the hundreds of lives they've changed, the friends they've met, the devotions they've lead and the faith they've built. It's impossible to not have faith when you're surrounded by 500 other campers who are just happy to do good. And when those same campers join in in nightly services and song, lead by our own Bill Josey, you can't help but get a warm feeling.

But it's not just the camp that does this. Every night Mr. Mullins teaches morals, passages, and stories. The Christian education that I have received through seven years of Christian private school pales in comparison to the 30 minutes Mr Mullins teaches every Sunday. Another great testament to the faith in Christianity is the story that Mr. Josey tells every year at workcamp. I won't tell that story now -- I feel it's only Mr J's to tell -- but I will say nothing gives my faith a boost every year like that story.

When I tell my school friends that I go to a workcamp every year, they don't understand why I would possibly volunteer for it. I tell them that its fun and they don't believe me. I tell them it's worth while and they won't hear anything of it. Yet

out of the thousands of kids who would never consider doing this willingly, what makes the 24 of us going this next year any different. The answer's clear as day: The Saint James' Youth group.

Almost everything in my life has changed in the past 7 years, and even when I leave for college in a few short months, one thing will still always remain the same: youth group, every Sunday from 6 to 8!

===== end of Josh's comments =====

In today's reading from Acts, we learn of some very odd behavior by Paul and Silas. While preaching about Christ (that's not the odd part), they prove to be quite effective and some influential men get them arrested for "disturbing the city." They end up in prison where they are praying and singing hymns at midnight, when an earthquake hits and opens all the cells and loosens everyone's chains. Now here's the odd part, rather than leaving, Paul and Silas remain in the prison. They are imprisoned by a regime that is so ruthless that the guard would rather kill himself than face what might happen to him had he been held responsible for permitting the prisoners to escape, but they choose not to leave. In fact, they get rather stubborn about it. If we were to read a bit further, we would find that the conversion of the jailer and his family is not the end of the story. The actual end involves even odder behavior by Paul and Silas. Not only did they

not leave when the earthquake set them free, they actually went back into the prison after being cared for by the jailer's family. Later that morning, word is sent to the prison by the magistrates that they are free to go. But instead of leaving, they refuse and actually stand up to the ruthless Roman regime and demand an apology, which they then receive. You see, Paul and Silas knew they were role models and it was up to them to showcase the power and love of Jesus. Through their apparent odd behavior during their short time in Philippi, they converted Lydia and her family, probably some of their fellow prisoners, the slave girl, and the jailer—whose life they saved—and his family, and probably many more.

And boy was their behavior noticed. After they leave Philippi, we will read in the next chapter that Paul and Silas continue west along the north shore of the Aegean Sea until they reach Thessalonica. When they begin preaching there, some of the Jews become jealous and begin searching for them, shouting to the city authorities that, "These people who have been turning the world upside down have come here also."

Now that's some powerful Christian formation—turning the world upside down. It may not be the world, but we do a little of that here at St. James'. One thing for sure, some lives are turned upside down. Sometimes it is those of others, and sometimes it is our own. As Josh has described, many of our youth experience

profound change and learn what it truly means to serve Christ. Sometimes it is through the act of serving on workcamp trips and sometimes it is through those we meet along the way. I've seen adult men and strong, strapping football players reduced to tears when their hearts are broken by the enormous faith put into daily practice by residents we have helped at workcamps. Daily blessings and thanksgivings being lifted to the Lord, by people who have so little; it makes you feel shame that your own faith is so small when you know you have so much.

Jesus prayed to his Father that the world may know that God had sent him and loves us in the way in which he was loved. May we continue to model that love at St. James' as we work to turn the world upside down.