

Youth Sunday Sermon

Fourth Sunday after Epiphany

Erin Murray
First Church Youth

February 3, 2019

From the Pulpit

The First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
444 East Broad Street, Columbus, OH 43215

Phone: 614.228.1741 Fax: 614.461.1741

Email: home@first-church.org

Website: <http://www.first-church.org>

Homily Given at First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, in Columbus, Ohio

Erin Murray, church member and junior at Dublin Coffman High School in Dublin, Ohio

Have you ever been in a situation where you knew something needed to be said but no one else in the room was stepping up and saying it? Did you feel compelled to speak up even though you were afraid? In the passage from Jeremiah that we heard earlier, God tells Jeremiah that even though his voice is young, it is meant to be heard and listened to.

While talking over the scripture with my mom, we recalled a cold day in March last year. The first day of spring break, the church had gathered a group of people to march from the lawn in front of COSI all the way down to the state house in a call for gun control. The March for Our Lives was orchestrated and planned by the students of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. The students never thought that such a tragic event would happen to them, but it did. Instead of letting another tragedy make the headlines for a week and then disappear into history, they stood up and spoke out. They had never been prepared to be thrust into the limelight, and yet, that's where they found themselves. I'm sure they were scared and didn't know what to say. But they found the words

and helped coordinate a massive march to stand up to the adults that told them they were too young to know what they were talking about.

So back to that freezing first day of spring break in March of 2018. On our way to the lawn in front of COSI, my mom, my friend, and I ran into Sherrod Brown. Yes, our Ohio Senator in the United States Senate, Sherrod Brown. I was floored, to say the least. To see a politician out in the wild? Amazing! As I waited to catch his and his wife's attention, I scrambled to find the words to say what it felt like to see someone who represented me at an event that I cared deeply about. When he finally turned and shook my hand, all I could think to say was thank you. He took my hand, smiled at me, and said, "There are lots of problems in our world that need to be addressed, and your mom's and my generation haven't gotten it done. We're relying on your generation to make it better". Do you think I got the short end of the stick here or what? Now those words are all well and good, but I had to ask myself, "what did I care about enough to step up and make a difference?" The world is so overflowing with problems that are now left to me and my generation and it is entirely overwhelming and stressful, to say the least.

But then last year, I was lucky enough to have the opportunity to apply to the Zoo School program at the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium, and lo and behold I made it into a class of 25 students from all over the greater Columbus area. And to make it in with my best friend? A dream come true. As part of our studies about general animal kingdom history at Zoo School, we are taught about the environment and conservation efforts at every turn. Every new group of animals we study has an environmental lesson taught along with it. Like, did you know the effects of carbon dioxide emissions are increasing the acidity of the ocean, which erodes a sponge's skeleton until it disintegrates? This leads to crippling and likely irreversible damage to coral reefs all over the world. I'm a lot of fun at parties! Also, every week a classmate researches an animal or environmental conservation issue and then presents it to the class.

I am so thankful that I was accepted into this wonderful 2-year program because I have finally found my passion. I have found a deep love and urge to protect the environment and I believe that God led me to the program. I can say that I have been lucky enough to find what speaks to my heart and I that have a platform, whether it be here at church, at school, or through social media. I can speak up for what I believe in just like the kids from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High school. So now

that I have this platform there's something I'd like to encourage you all to do. Did you know that there is a way to recycle #5 plastics in Columbus? Whole Foods has recycling bins for #5 plastics such as yogurt and margarine containers.

God speaks to us through the scripture, "Act, speak up, lead the way. I am with you". Every person sitting here today has a different interest than the person sitting beside them. Often times we may feel like we are the only ones who have that interest, but that's not true. Our country stands with the Parkland students, my 24 classmates stand with me, and our congregation stands together for social justice. We have found that we are not alone in our passion. And if you speak up and take action, odds are good that you will not be alone either.

Copyright 2019, First Congregational Church, UCC