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February 3, 2019

Youth Sunday

*A Collection of Six
Senior Sermons*

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Andrew Sharpe

²⁶ Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, and not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no one might boast in the presence of God.

Good morning! For those of you who do not know me, my name is Andrew Sharpe. I am the son of Carolyn and Jeff Sharpe, and the brother of Ali Sharpe. I am currently a senior at Hidden Valley High School. I plan to further my education at Radford University next year, studying business management. I am ecstatic about starting this new chapter of my life and stand before you today to present my senior sermon, a rite of passage here at 2PC. I have been quite involved in the youth group here ever since I was eligible in the sixth grade. I have participated in many events, community service projects, and trips through the duration of my time as a youth in our church. One of the most impactful experiences I have had as a youth with Second Presbyterian was serving on a mission trip in the Dominican Republic during the summer of 2017. As a group, we hosted a vacation bible school for the local children. This mission trip helped me gain more insight into who I am and who I want to become with Christ as my guide.

My trip prompted me to consider how I am called. Today's scripture reading asks us to consider our calling. Corinthians 1:26-29 says:

²⁶ Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, and not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no one might boast in the presence of God.

God calls persons of all different characters. This helps me to realize that God accepts all types of people and calls us for various reasons. What is He calling me to do? What are my strengths? What are my weaknesses? As I think about this, I realize I can easily name my weaknesses. What does He see in me? There is a lesson here for me and for all of us. I believe God has placed individuals in my life who have strengthened me and helped set me on a path. I could state the obvious and name our pastors, youth leaders, and my parents—all of whom have positively impacted my life—



but there is someone else who has impacted me. I believe God calls people to help others find their strengths and see beyond their weaknesses. A person who has done this for me is Ken Lyons.

I first met Ken when he was my teacher for my confirmation class during my eighth-grade year. Ken is extremely involved in Boy Scouts, as am I. He encouraged me and guided me through the process of starting a job as a counselor at a local Boy Scout camp for my first summer job. After working most of the summer at Scout camp, I made a poor decision that resulted in a job termination. After this incident, Ken continued to reach out to me and was still extremely supportive of me and guided me to become a stronger individual through Christ. Ken is a living example of how second chances and forgiveness are possible, even when they are not always deserved. I'm thankful for the Lord in calling Ken to guide me. His willingness to continue to support and help me, especially during my Eagle Scout project, has shown me so much about character and what it means to walk in one's faith. Ken continued to give me advice, suggestions, and showed up in a very real way for me. I don't know if he even realizes the impact he has made in my life.

Because of his influence, I know that God calls me despite my weaknesses. I hope I may one day have this same kind of impact in someone's life.

Amen.



John 13:3-5, 12-15

Caroline Smith

³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴ rose from supper, laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel. ⁵ Then he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded.

¹² When he had washed their feet, and taken his garments, and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you."

Hi, my name is Caroline Smith. I am a senior at Hidden Valley. You may know me from my grandparents, Linda and Phil Shiner, or my parents, Beth and Jeff Smith. Now that that is out of the way, I have to say I can't believe I am actually up here today. It feels like just yesterday I was sitting on my best friend's bathroom floor as we painted each other's toenails. Coincidentally, that is about as close as I have been to what we just heard Jesus did. Could you imagine your teacher or boss getting down on the dirty floor to wash your feet? I can't. How crazy is that? Peter is the only one who risks asking Jesus what is going on, and Jesus responds with a vague answer. He says you can't understand now, but you can't have any part of me unless you let me do this. Peter is instantly like alright, okay, sounds good. Isn't that crazy? Peter trusted Jesus so much that he just believed that he would eventually understand. I think we all could use a little bit of that in our lives. I know I wish Jesus would come to me right now and tell me where to go to college, then tell me, "Trust me, it's the right one." While the blind trust shown is inspiring, what is truly amazing is what comes next.

Jesus says to them, "Servants are not greater than their master, nor are messengers greater than the one who sent them." I know what you are thinking. Surely this can't be right. You think I know we are supposed to be equal, but my neighbor's car is definitely better than mine. None of that matters to God. Money and items have no true meaning. God sees us for who we are on the inside and loves us all equally. Jesus tells us that we are all equal in God's eyes. No one person is better than



another. He says if I can wash your feet, then you can help everyone. You are not better than anyone. You are not less than anyone.

This year, our theme in youth group is “Upside Down.” Many times throughout scripture, we are told no earthly systems apply to God. The first shall be last; the last shall be first. This can be reassuring. Whenever I feel down, I can remember I am perfect and equal in God’s eyes. At the same time, this can be terrifying. Everything that holds society together in day to day life is inconsequential to God. I like to have a plan. This leaves no room for me to be prepared. Except in a way it does. After Jesus finished washing the disciples’ feet, he says to them “If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have set you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you.” Life is unpredictable. One thing is certain: We must follow God’s path and help all that we can.

I have had the incredible privilege to go on four mission trips with this church. I have eaten amongst the homeless and shared hammers with a four-year-old. I have never felt closer to God than on these trips. It is easy to get wrapped up in our schedules and material goods. I have met people happier than me with so much less. After witnessing their smiles and laughter despite their circumstances, I realized the only thing stopping most of us from being happy is ourselves. No one of us is better than another. We all need to take moments to enjoy the things we love. Here is a quote from Mary Oliver’s poem, “The Summer Day,” that my grandma gave to me. It reads, “Tell me what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?” I recommend you throw your head back in laughter every day. Look at your life and ask yourself, “Have I helped someone this week?” It’s time to turn your world upside down. Wash your friend’s feet. Ask someone how they are feeling. Give someone the hug they desperately need. Love everyone deeply.

I am going to end with some words from the song, “Upside Down” by Jack Johnson, that we should all live by and remember: “Who’s to say what’s impossible. I want to turn the whole thing upside. I’ll find the things they say just can’t be found. I’ll share this love I find with everyone.”



Shelby Stanley

⁴⁶ And Mary said, “My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸ for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed; ⁴⁹ for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. ⁵⁰ And his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation. ⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, ⁵² he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; ⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away. ⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, ⁵⁵ as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity for ever.”

My name is Shelby Stanley. I'm the daughter of John and Lisa Stanley, and the granddaughter of Patricia Vaughn and Jack and Sue Stanley. I am a senior at Patrick Henry and I have attended Second Presbyterian for 17 years. I was baptized in this very sanctuary. I grew up in the nursery and I attended the downstairs preschool. I sang in the children's choir and rejoiced the day that I was old enough to join the “big kids” at youth group. I eventually confirmed my faith by becoming a member of the church, and now I stand before you today. Needless to say, I have always had a big church family to help me grow.

Most people that know me are aware that I swim... a lot. My long journey began when I was five years old, the day that I went to my first swim practice. The countless hours that I have dedicated to the sport since that day have helped me develop priceless relationships as the pool quickly became the home of my second family.

I have also been fortunate enough to be blessed with a *lively*, supportive family. I have a sister that I am lucky enough to call my role model and I have two benevolent parents that have sacrificed more than I could ever imagine for my success and happiness.

This passage from Luke, also known as the Magnificat, is Mary's response to the Angel Gabriel's news that she has been chosen to carry the Son of God. Mary



starts by saying that her soul magnifies the Lord, and that her spirit rejoices in God the Savior. This is one of the most fundamental beliefs in the Christian community—that as Christians it is our job to amplify God’s voice; that it is our job to spread the word of our Savior.

I attended the Montreat Youth Conference this past summer where these verses were brought to light in my eyes. The theme of the week was *Lifting Up Your Voice*: a common idea that was shaped by current events and Bible passages. The sermons and small group sessions completely changed my idea of how I can serve my Christian community. I learned that although I am young, this is the time to start raising my voice for what I think is right, to start raising my voice for those around me that cannot lift theirs, and to start raising my voice to spread the word of God.

Mary continues by saying, “Surely from now on, all generations will call me blessed; for the Mighty One has done great things for me.” This is a verse that is exemplified in every one of us. God has blessed each person in different ways. For me, I classify my biggest blessing as the outpouring of love that I have received throughout my childhood from my different families.

The passage ends by Mary professing that God helped Israel according to the promise that he made to our ancestors, to Abraham, and to his descendants forever. I find that SO powerful. God has promised us forgiveness. God has provided us with grace. God has loved us with no stipulations. All from the promise that he made our ancestors, for all of mankind. His commitment to all generations.

That’s what this passage is about. The Magnificat represents God’s eternal greatness and God’s eternal love for all people. Throughout this passage God promises to guide us, even when the answers do not always seem clear. This is something that I have experienced throughout my faith journey. The week of Montreat was also the week of my championship swim meet. I was conflicted between continuing my faith journey—in turn giving up the championship meet of the most important summer of my entire swimming career—or forgo a trip that I had wanted to attend for many years for the chance of MAYBE going one or two best times. After many months of deliberation, God led me to Montreat, which I still describe as the best experience of my life.

I come from generations of devoted Christians. Although I grew up in the church, my parents left me to determine my own faith. Throughout my childhood, my



faith has provided me with security. God's promise to me has helped me to find my own voice. At times when I struggled with swimming, I turned to God for clarity. At times when I completely lost my way, I turned to God for guidance. These pastors, these retreats, this youth group, and this church family have been instrumental in my faith, which has ultimately helped me become the person that I am today.

I am following the footsteps of my family and beginning the next chapter of my life by swimming with my sister for Davidson College. Family has shaped my entire life and I know that it will continue to help me succeed. As I delve deeper into my faith journey, I know that I will have endless support to help me remember that God's promise of mercy will proceed with every passing day.



Lilli Clevenger

²⁶ Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were powerful, and not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, things that are not, to reduce to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no one might boast in the presence of God.

Hi, my name is Lilli Clevenger and I am a senior at James River High School. I am the daughter of Pattie and Todd Clevenger, and the sister of Patrick Clevenger. I've attended Second Presbyterian my entire life. You may know my mom from singing in the choir, my dad... not so much. We've all been caught up in trying to be successful, I'm sure. I don't just mean doing what you have to do to keep improving, I'm talking about staying up all night, canceling any plans, and focusing solely on that one task. Making sure that you get that promotion, you get an A on that test, or you win the game. This is all fine of course, there's nothing wrong with being committed and driven, or in other words, hard-working. In fact, being hard-working is considered one of the most admired qualities in an individual. You'll do practically whatever it takes to reach your goal. And when you reach these goals, there's usually nothing you want more than to share it with your friends, family, or maybe Instagram followers. The problem arises when all of this gets in the way of our relationships with God and those around us.

Being successful in and of itself is not a problem. I get it, we all want to be "somebody." We want to walk around where people know our names, and know we've done something good and worthwhile. We don't want to be a "nobody." A lot of times to reach this goal, we present ourselves with a sort of filter. For example, when we post something on Facebook or Twitter, or even just in casual conversation, we don't always present the entire story. We boast about the good things in our life, make it look like our life is going great, and that we are always moving forward, always busy, trying to be "somebody," trying not to look like a "nobody." Let me just remind you: God cares about the poor, the powerful, the mighty, and the meek. Those considered "nothings" or "nobodies" are not considered that in God's eyes. In *The Message Bible*, 1 Corinthians 1:27-28 says, "Isn't it obvious that God deliberately chose men and women that the culture overlooks and exploits and abuses, chose these 'nobodies' to expose the hollow pretensions of the 'somebodies?'" Just because some may be more successful, more popular, and possess more material things, doesn't



mean that others are lesser to God. However, we can often forget about this fact, and we work ourselves to death trying to be an amazing “somebody.”

This can often lead into us drifting away from what God chooses for us and moving towards what society and those around us determines we should do. It's not always sudden either. It's so gradual that when you seem to wake up from your trance, you don't understand how you could have strayed so far from what God chose for you, and for the world. As 1 Corinthians 1:27 says, “God has chosen what is foolish in the world to shame the wise and God has chosen what is weak in the world to shame the strong...” GOD CHOSE. Not your best friend, not your sister or brother, not your neighbor, cousin, or the guy who always bags your groceries at the grocery store. Not me, and not you, but God. So if God says those “nobodies” are “somebody,” why should we say any different? If God says we are beautiful, kind, and smart, even when we might not always agree, what is our argument? We didn't choose, we have no say.

This can be both scary and comforting, and we often decide to push it aside. To hide that fact, we can sometimes boast about our successes. Sometimes it's hard for us to realize we aren't in control, and we all want to broadcast what we have had our hand in. It is most common to boast about our successes. We could possibly boast about other things as well, but most of the time it will revolve around us. As I was reading around the verse I was given to have a better understanding about what I should share with you all, I came across 1 Corinthians 1:31, the end states, “Let one who boasts, boast in the Lord.” Don't let your personal successes and the structures of this world make it to where your life focuses on you, and not God. We shouldn't look down on those who are not up to par with the standards we have chosen; God doesn't see it that way. We don't choose, God chooses, we just have to answer his call.



John 13:3-5, 12-15

Kaitlyn Dickson

³ Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going to God, ⁴ rose from supper, laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel. ⁵ Then he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded.

¹² When he had washed their feet, and taken his garments, and resumed his place, he said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? ¹³ You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. ¹⁴ If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. ¹⁵ For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you."

My name is Kaitlyn Dickson and I am a senior at William Byrd. I am the daughter of Chasity Fitzpatrick and Troy Dickson. I have been a part of Second Presbyterian with the Fitzpatricks for almost ten years. Ever since sixth grade, I have counted down the years until I would be standing here to preach God's word. Now that it is finally here, I started to reflect and think about everything God has done for me. Not only what he has done for me, but the situations I've been in where I am the one washing others' feet. While I was reflecting on the scripture, I immediately thought of the most recent mission trip I went on.

This past summer I went to Kentucky to volunteer at Appalachia Service Project. The ASP is a Christian ministry where we can inspire hope and service through home repair and replacement. During the week we were there, I got to not only get on my knees to dig at least a foot and a half deep hole for the porch post, but I got to meet the sweetest little girl named Darcy.

Darcy did not have the best life. She was diagnosed with cancer and had to fight for her life. Every time we showed up, she was so excited and happy to help whenever she could. Whether it was holding a piece of wood or filling up our water bottles, she gladly took on the challenge. Even though she had been through so much, she always kept a smile on her face and was ready to take on the new day. God had not only put me on this trip to improve their house, but to open my eyes to realize how much I have to be grateful for and how I do not need the best life to be happy and content.



Another time in my life where I felt God was humbling me was when I went to volunteer with my mom at the House of Bread. This program helps women who are coming out of jail to get back on their feet. After we were finished baking the breads, we all sat down and listened to everyone's stories and it made me realize how thankful I am for mine. It also made me think about how hard it must have been for these women to go through such traumatic experiences.

But I have learned that even in hard times we can learn to appreciate the good times and memories we have. I have learned that when we are humble, we are able to respond to difficult situations. Instead of always wanting more and never being satisfied with what we have, we should appreciate everything we do have and our privileges. God has blessed all of us in different forms and has provided us with a safe and welcoming family and community.

Jesus is the teacher and Lord as he mentions in the scripture, yet he gets down and washes the disciples' feet. He then goes on to say that he is setting an example for us to follow. Instead of him just telling the servants to be humble and serve others, he acted on it. He's giving us a call to action by saying how we should follow his footsteps—whether it's by going on a mission trip or taking five minutes out of your day to check up on someone who has been having a rough time. Not only does this brighten the person's day, but also gives you humility for everything good happening in your life.

When you are having a good day, why not share it with someone who needs a little light in their life. That way when a time comes where things are not going the way you thought, there will be another person to pick you up and spread the kindness that Jesus has taught us. By following Jesus's steps, we can make everyone's day a little bit better all while keeping humble.



Ann Ashley Daniel

⁴⁶ And Mary said, "My soul magnifies the Lord, ⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, ⁴⁸ for he has regarded the low estate of his handmaiden. For behold, henceforth all generations will call me blessed; ⁴⁹ for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name. ⁵⁰ And his mercy is on those who fear him from generation to generation. ⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm, he has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts, ⁵² he has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; ⁵³ he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away. ⁵⁴ He has helped his servant Israel, in remembrance of his mercy, ⁵⁵ as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and to his posterity for ever."

Good morning. My name is Ann Ashley Daniel. I have been a member of Second Presbyterian for 14 years. In that time, I have been a shepherd in a Christmas pageant, been confirmed, travelled to San Juan de la Maguana on a mission trip, and attended the Youth Conference at Montreat twice. Through the church, I have learned about scripture, community, service, and how to play Duck Duck Goose in Spanish (Pato Pato Ganza, in case you were curious).

I have met amazing people, developed great friendships, and made incredible memories in these 14 years. The church, this church, means a lot to myself and my family. It was on these steps that my parents, Catherine and Charles Daniel were married, my mother attended preschool here, and my grandparents, Betty and Edmund Lesko have been members for twice as long as I have been alive. But soon, I will face the daunting decision of choosing a college to attend and leave my home and church behind for most of the year. Change seems a little scary at times, but Second Presbyterian and the people here have been a rock, embedded into the lives of three generations. But God works in different ways and will move in my life no matter where I go.

In Genesis 12, God tells Abraham: "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives, And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you; And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you." Here I am, at the age of seventeen, delivering my first sermon. I recently learned that around this age my great-grandfather began not only delivering sermons as a Methodist minister in Texas but travelling to preach at *five* churches in *five* different towns. And I thought I was



nervous. Several years later, his father died, and he took upon himself the responsibility of serving his father's entire congregation. He had to move frequently (as Methodist ministers may not serve one congregation for longer than four years at a time) and had to uproot constantly his entire life. His house and all his belongings were even destroyed by arson twice in the same year.

He was a man that had to leave behind relatives, homes, and communities. And God blessed him, giving him a great career that allowed him to do such interesting things as travel the world and even represent Methodism in Zimbabwe after their civil war where he met the interim president, another Methodist minister, after he had been jailed. He did amazing things, despite incredible hardship.

Like Abraham and like my great grandfather, I know that soon I will go forth from that which is familiar. But I know that I, too, have been blessed. When terrible things happen in the world, in our lives, in our communities, it is hard to feel that blessing; it's hard to look around and feel God's presence. But God was with Abraham, and that promise has extended to my family as well, generation after generation. Remembering that, it's a lot easier to trust that no matter what happens in my life, God will be with me as well, always. Thank you.

