

Bucyrus United Methodist Church

Youth Sunday – April 30, 2023

Maggie Ridge

My original plan was to get up here and preach about some sort of Bible story or to tell you that Jesus saves and that you should go spread the Gospel.

I don't know how many of you realized that this Sunday was supposed to be the last Youth Sunday with Pastor Mike as our pastor. About a month or two ago, Pastor Mike came up to me and said, "I want you to write a sermon, and I want you to preach to the congregation on our next Youth Sunday." I immediately said "I don't think I can do that" but my dad looked at me and said "Yes, you can. I want you to do this." So, I went home after church, sat on the couch, and watched tv. I put this whole sermon thing off, thinking, "Oh well, they won't remember it and I won't have to do it." Boy, I was wrong! I showed up at church every Sunday after that and the first thing Pastor Mike said to me is, "How's your sermon going?" I just shrugged my shoulders and said, "it's fine," when, in reality, it wasn't.

I soon realized that it was April and in 5 Sundays, I had to get up in front of 100 or so people and preach about God. I had to preach about a God that I barely know anything about. I kept telling myself that I couldn't do it and that I wouldn't be able to ever teach a story about an amazing God who sent his son so we could be forgiven for all of our sins. So where does everyone go when they don't know what to do?..... That's right, I went to Google. I looked up sermons and changed the words so it sounded like they were coming out of my mouth. I would read it through but it still didn't sound like me. I had Josh help me out but it wasn't me. So I decided to ask Pastor Becky, but what she wrote just wasn't me. My last resort was to ask Pastor Mike.

But as you know, Pastor Mike was recently diagnosed with Gillian-Barré Syndrome and his last sermon was on Easter. As of last Sunday at 9:54 pm, I decided it was time to speak up and tell everyone about Pastor Mike. Pastor Mike to me is more than a pastor, more than a father to his kids, or a grandfather to his grandchildren, or even a great grandpa. He is my friend. He showed me a way that I could live freely. He is not only a friend to me but a friend to all of you too. He is kind, respectful, respected, passionate, genuine, and above all irreplaceable. He is so strong and so faithful to God that, whatever he is going through, I know that he can do it. He has been through numerous surgeries and still showed up at church with a smile on his face. He sat here and greeted everyone as they walked into the church every Sunday morning. He continuously picked on Sheba for her outgoing and brilliant personality and he did it all with a smile on his face.

I sit up on the balcony almost every Sunday. Almost every Sunday that he's here, I look down at him and, whether he's making a face up at me or just smiling, it would make my day. Pastor Mike is an influence. He influences adults, teens, and even children. He influenced me. He influenced my mother and my father. He has influenced our Youth. He's influenced our Congregation as a whole. Now don't get me wrong. I know he's not dead, but something is just so different when he's not around. I feel like sometimes I come to church in a grumpy mood

then suddenly feel so awake because Pastor Mike sensed that we as a church were tired so he would blast Days of Elijah in our ears until we got so annoyed by it. God is so wonderful and has blessed me to meet such a wonderful pastor.

In scripture it says, "The Lord did not set his heart on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other nations, for you were the smallest of all nations! Rather, it was simply that the Lord loves you, and he was keeping the oath he had sworn to your ancestors. That is why the Lord rescued you with such a strong hand from your slavery and the oppressive hand of Pharaoh, King of Egypt. Understand, therefore, that the Lord your God is indeed God. He is a faithful God who keeps his covenant for a thousand generations and lavishes his unflinching love on those who love him and obey his commands." Deuteronomy 7:7-9

This short passage tells us how our lives of sweet forgiveness were not chosen because we were big and popular but because we are the smallest of all. He has rescued us from our hurt and from our temptations. He is faithful and is loving to those who love him and continue to put our faith into him.

God is great. God is good. And for me to be able to know one of God's greatest creations in Pastor Mike is remarkable to me. The things that Pastor Mike has said to me or even said in his sermons, or taught us throughout Confirmation have really helped me and my journey through God so much.

I started coming to church when I was in 2nd grade with my grandparents just for fun. But now that I know that I have met some of my lifelong friends here at church, I don't think I could imagine my life without God in it. He has given me strength when I am weak. He has answered my prayers when I needed it most. And above all, he blessed us with one of the coolest pastors in the world.

I know whatever Pastor Mike goes through, he will get through it because God is with him. And with his faith, nothing can hurt him. The same is true for all of us. No matter how tough the road ahead may seem, reaching out to God's extended hand will provide more assurance and peace than anything else this world can provide. Just as nothing can come between my relationship with God, nothing can come between your relationship with our eternal father.

The same is true for relationships with the people around us. My friends and I may argue some days, but life is too short to get caught up in it. Keep your loved ones close and the ones you disagree with even closer. Just as my relationship with Pastor Mike will continue, don't let any barrier come between you and the people you love.

I know you were expecting another regular Youth Sunday where the youth come up and preach about a random topic. I know you probably didn't expect to come to church and listen to a 14 year old girl express her love for God and the people God has sent to her but.... Surprise!! Faith can change your life. And with a little faith you can do amazing things.