

MAXINE BOUGH'S CHURCH SERMON (5/14/23)

Good morning everyone and Happy Mothers Day for all of the amazing women out in the congregation! I think I speak for everyone when I thank you for all of your love and influence no matter who you are. For those of you who don't know, my name is Maxine and I am a senior this year from Terre Haute North. I welcome you all to Central this morning and am so glad to have you all here. When I learned that the service this morning would be focused on the theme of relationships I was really excited. With my graduation quickly approaching, I've begun thinking about a lot of my relationships, and how they will change with the big milestones coming up.

When I was 9 years old, I would come to the church during the summers for the craft bizarre. For weeks the ladies of the church would get together to make crafts to sell. While my mom was busy helping the other ladies and making crafts of her own, some of the bizarre ladies, as they liked to be called, took on the task of occupying me. That summer they taught me how to knit, and for years afterward I forgot the skill and let it go. But a couple of months ago I found my old supplies from that summer and picked it back up. Now I have knit a sweater and even picked up crocheting.

This might seem a little random, but I promise there is a point. When I was 9, I would come and spend time with the bizarre ladies for multiple hours a few days a week. This was one of the highlights of my summer and I loved spending time with the ladies. But, as I got older, my summers got busy, the bizarre stopped, and I didn't get to spend as much time with the crafts or the ladies.

Fast forward 9 years to this summer. Since then I have made and lost friends. People have come and gone. But I have finally found myself surrounded by the people who make me feel the most like myself. They encourage and support me, they feel like my home. In the next couple of weeks, my last moments of high school are coming to an end. After that is graduation, and then just a couple of months before I

pack up for college. At college, I have decided to live with my best friend. And I've heard all the precautions, "you'll get sick of each other" and "all the dark details come out when you live together". But I never doubted it for a second, because, while she might drive me crazy sometimes, she is like a piece of my home. She makes me the best version of myself. I am blessed to be taking on the next chapter of my life with her. But there are so many other people who live so close to my heart that I can't take with me.

My underclassmen friends, my friends going to different or far away schools, and even my family. These people make up my support system. I've noticed that when I think of my close circle of friends, my family, and my church, or talk about them, I've given them a label in my head. I always refer to them as "my people". My support group, my family, they are "my people". And as I began thinking about this service it clicked that this is something I've heard before.

"God's people"

This is something I've realized we say a lot in church, but I don't think it was until I found my people that I truly understood what that meant. We are frequently called "God's people". As God's people, we learn of his unconditional love, a love that never fails. Psalm 23 said "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me." Through any circumstance, no matter what we do or where we go, he will always be with us. Even if we are taking on something new and intimidating, his love will support us. Even when we don't turn to him for a long time, he still loves us. Even if we can't attend the same church and sit in the same pew every weekend, he will still love us. There is no right or wrong, it doesn't have to be earned or divided. The third reading said, "Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it". We are all his people, all equally deserving and receiving his love. And that's what being one of God's people means. We are one in Christ, and God will watch over us as his own.

I know I've probably mentioned college a lot already, but with graduation fast approaching it's been on my mind a lot. A year ago I watched my brother move all the way to Georgia to pursue his passion for film and television. When we were really little, many people can probably attest to the fact that we had a very typical sibling relationship full of bickering and fighting and just general annoyances. But as we got older, as we got more mature, he became someone that I looked up to. I like to joke that I choose what to do by doing whatever Miller did but do it better. But as we began to share hobbies and interests, he became one of my best friends. So when it came time for him to put all his things in a bag and leave, I was convinced that things would never be the same. I figured we'd never talk, I would be all alone, and he wouldn't be there for my senior year. Obviously, I was a little dramatic at the time, but despite the distance and the busy schedules, it almost feels like he never left. While he's not physically here, I still get to have inside jokes with him through texts or phone calls. I still get to show him all of the stuff that I'm doing and ask for his advice. And he still finds his own little ways to push my buttons.

And now that it's my turn to move forward, I'm realizing how relationships that aren't as long-term have influenced me. For those of you who don't know, I am majoring in secondary math education in the fall. I know, just what everyone wants to be when they grow up, a high school math teacher. But when I realized that I wanted to be a teacher, it was because of the incredible teachers who took the time to make a relationship with their students. Even though I don't talk to some of them anymore, their time, effort, and passion for what they did showed me the kind of impact I wanted to make. Before I left for middle school, my fifth-grade writing teacher wrote me a two-page letter. When I was recovering from my hip surgery, my sixth-grade math teacher would wait with me outside for my mom to pick me up so I didn't have to use crutches with my backpack. For three years my English teacher has made her room a safe place in a big school. My choir teacher has shown unwavering confidence in me every day for the past four years. My Chemistry teacher has

challenged me and shown more confidence and interest in my academics and my future more than any other teacher I have ever had. None of those actions were listed in their job descriptions. But those relationships and their actions have impacted my future forever. That is the kind of love that I want to provide as a teacher.

Even though I didn't knit for years after the bizarre ladies here taught me, when I picked it back up and even learned to crochet, there were so many people who talked to me about their own experiences and passions. Even though things had changed, I felt the same love and support for my hobby and for myself from the people in the church. It wasn't still the summer of 2013 in the fellowship hall with the bizarre approaching quickly, and some of those amazing women are no longer with us, but the love and support has been the same. When I go to move to college, I'll be leaving behind so many amazing people, "my people". But in the same way I saw through the women of the church, God's love for "his people" can not be shaken or broken, and I know that no matter how much things change, "my people" will always be there. I will talk to my amazing friends and see them on breaks. My family and this congregation will be there for weekend visits and holidays. That same love will be with me in Muncie and it will be just as strong when I come back home. As God's people, it is not just our duty, but our privilege to extend this long-lasting love in our lives and model all of our relationships after this love. I hope each of you can stop for a moment today and identify "your people". Send them a text or give them a call. Share the love of being one of "God's people" with those people, because that love will never change.