

**Youth Sunday Sermon May 21, 2017**  
**Delivered by Beanie (Christine) McGrew and Rachel Hageman**

**Beanie:** May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sights, Oh'Lord. Our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

When we were pondering our favorite sermons, Rachel and I referred to some of the people we've seen give stories and testimonies. We decided that with our sermon we're going to share some stories with you. The all famous Winnie The Pooh once said "How lucky am I to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard," and I think that quote is extremely applicable in this instance as the little family that we've built is going to be very hard to let go.

**Rachel:** Our youth group has been blessed with many adventures and chances to explore our talents. My first story starts long ago when Matthew and I came to this church for the first time. Now, I'm not sure how many of you remember this so let me set the scene. We came in around the fall or winter season and yes, as been said many times, I did say to Pastor Mairaine on her first Sunday with us, "Are you going to be back next week?"

Anyway, we moved into the season when the Christmas pageant was being planned and while Pearl was trying to fight for Shepard #1, silent, socially terrified Matthew (clearly things have changed) hid in the corner trying to avoid all lines possible. Being the wonderful sister and person I am \*wink wink shove shove\* I demanded the part of Mary. Now, of course I got it, mainly because no one else wanted to be Mary, but what I didn't account for was that Joseph had no lines. As you may have guessed, yes, that means the first time I was in an activity with the twins and my brother at this church, Matthew and I played Joseph and Mary. Not only that, but the twins didn't like us so they refused to speak to us. Absolutely refused.

Skip forward a year or two and the twins still didn't like me but were best friends with Matthew, to the point where a near death experience playing potato baseball in our old backyard allowed a man to ask first if Matthew and Marian were twins but then if they and Pearl were triplets. Imagine the woe of me being left out. Eventually though, after a slew of bike rides, attendances at annual UCC Conferences, and a, interesting to say the least trip to Heifer Farm, we became one big group of friends.

**Beanie:** My first time at church, my parents tried to force me to socialize. Much to their dismay, I refused. I thought I got away with it when this beautiful girl came up to me and said "Hi! I'm Rachel, what's your name?"

**Rachel:** Little did she know, our lovely pastor forced me over there, saying she was new and we had to become friends.

**Beanie:** Rachel and I became fast friends, she made me feel like I was in a safe place and it was easy for me to open up. Then came along Matt. Matt is a precious soul and I hate to say that at first, he was not my favorite. He was the "in your face be my friend" kind of person while I preferred to be antisocial. But once the word "color guard" passed his lips, we were instant friends as well. Matt and I have been friends for a little over three years and I couldn't ask for a better friend. Over the time that I've known him he's taught me many valuable lessons that I didn't think I'd ever learn. He taught me how to be strong, and even that being weak was okay.

He taught me that friends are the people who are always by your side. And he taught me that sometimes hugs speak louder than words.

The twins took a little more time. I could tell I wasn't their favorite person and when I asked Rachel she told me it would probably take some time for them to warm up to me. We became sort-of-friends, but we really grew close once we went to Watson Homestead my freshman year. Sharing a room with them definitely opened them up. I'm proud to say that after about a year, I finally got the twins to be my friends. Over the next two ish years of our friendship, we grew closer and we learned more about one another. They taught me some things too like hydrating is something everyone should do. And how being on the track team is completely crazy. But they also taught me things that I didn't know I needed to learn, like how waiting patiently for something to happen can be so much better than forcing it. Or how the best things might take a little time. But most importantly, they taught me that being silent can be the bravest and strongest thing that a person can do. They taught me how to stand up for myself in tough situation and how to stand up for others in even harder ones.

**Rachel:** Our initial stories are in expression of how something so small and insignificant can grow into a family, a family as strong as the extended McCoopmans. And I think Pocahontas said it best because, "I'd rather die tomorrow than live a hundred years without knowing you." Marian has taught me over the years that you don't need to be the loudest personality in the room to make the best friendships. Somehow in that sense, she's always the first among us to make friends at youth events. Pearl has helped me figure out that you don't necessarily need a positive attitude every second of every day to make the best impression. Positivity can be brought to the table by someone else as often it is much more pleasant to have a more realistic outlook on things that are going on. It sounds a bit negative but it actually keeps our little group practical and brings us to fantastic new topics of conversation.

**Beanie:** But these aren't the only people who have affected us throughout our time here. Carter, who I was really able to get to know this year, also had an effect on our lives. For me, Carter helped me to be myself because that's who she is. She taught me to be loud and accept everyone. She taught me the true value of being an artsy person, and how art is almost always messy. Another person that had a huge impact on me this year was my best friend, Tory. She helped me through the toughest parts of this year and reminded me that I wasn't alone. She helped me to open up and talk about my stresses and fears instead of keeping them inside. I think the most valued lesson I learned from her was how to be confident in whatever choice I made, even if it didn't turn out the way I wanted it to.

**Rachel:** Though I personally haven't known Carter as long as I've gotten to spend with the rest of our magic little family, I've known her long enough to recognize that she is one of the most kind and personable people you will ever gain the chance to meet. She is caring and full of heart and has shown me that love can be undefinable. By knowing her, I am made a better person, someone who is more aware of the world around me and God's abundant care for everyone. Tory is more of a sister to me and being a sister I am so proud of her. I have known her since i was a measly fifth grader trying to hang out with Matt's friends and fit in and be cool. She has only recently connected more openly with God and through that has shown me that any little experience can change someone's life for the better. There are tons of scattered memories that include Tory but all of them land me with a smile on my face. That's exactly what she does.

She lets go of all of the hard times and finds the stormy cloud's silver lining. For that lesson in bright side thinking, I am eternally grateful to Tory for changing my life and making me as smiley and positive as plausible.

**Beanie:** This family that we have formed through our year here has grown close and it's going to be extremely hard to say goodbye to them, but we know that we have to let them go so they are able to spread the magic and memories that we have made together. Through all the inside jokes, weird conversations, disagreements, and even those awkward situations where we made Rachel do all the talking, we grew so close as a family of faith and I couldn't ask for a better experience.

**Rachel:** And here as I stand before you all still doing a lot of talking I'd like to thank our seniors but not only them. I'd like to thank Mr. Walker, Mrs. Graf, and dearest pastor Mairaine as well as everybody else who has had a part in facilitating our little group over the years. Further, our parental units who have funded and shipped us all over the place to see and experience awesome stuff. And as an extension of that, everyone here in our extended church family who has helped parent us and grow us into the group of youth that we are. I think that I can speak for all of us, our seniors and Beanie and I saying that we couldn't ask for a better community to grow up in. All of your stories and the lessons you've taught us has made us the special snowflakes we are. The people who look to change the future and teach the next generations even after us. Which then turns us to you little youth middle schoolers. Seeing as this is your community and church family now, take care of them. Bring on the hard questions and grow from precocious children to inquiring young adults. The greatest piece of advice I can give to you all is give Pastor Mairaine a hard time and remember to say thank you until after your mouth hurts from saying it.

Morning Prayer: Graceful Lord, as we all take one more step into the future, we look to you to assist us in facing the changes and challenges that we will come upon in our time of discovery. We pray that you will help guide all of us, and to comfort and support us in this time of reinvention and renewal. We ask that you lead us in a righteous direction but also help us when we make mistakes, to forgive ourselves, and love one another. May we pray to be grounded in integrity and grace, to know that wherever we go, we are still welcome in your arms. AMEN.