

**Sermon by Bev Maslow,
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Some of you may have heard parts of my story before so please bear with me if you have.

I'll start by saying that sometimes I wish I had a defining moment in my life that I can pinpoint to tell you that was the day/hour that Christ became the center of my life but I don't have that.

I've never known a time that church wasn't a part of my life and a Disciples of Christ (Disciples) church at that. As a child, I went to the church that was in my neighborhood. I never asked my parents why they went there. I don't think it was because it was conveniently located in my neighborhood but there must have been a reason they picked a Disciples church. I may never know the reason, but now I'm just thankful they did.

There were many Sunday mornings, ok, *every* Sunday morning that I wished I didn't have to go to church. I remember lying in bed on Sunday mornings and thinking "if I lay here real quiet, Mama and Daddy will oversleep and I won't have to go to church". That never worked. They *always* woke up in time for worship and Sunday School, too! As they say, neither rain, nor sleet nor snow... we went *every* Sunday.

Once I got to church, I did enjoy it. I liked seeing my friends. It was a social time for me. But in the fifties and sixties, that was probably true for most people as we didn't have the "competition" for our attention that we have today.

I can remember getting a whipping or two when I got home from church because I had misbehaved so much during worship. Every week I talked, wiggled and giggled (and we all know how funny things are when you're not supposed to laugh). I don't know why my mom and dad let me sit with my best friend every week because we couldn't sit still or be quiet and we always sat in the *front* of the church. What patience everyone must have had with us. What great memories!

And the revivals. Every year we held a revival and, you guessed it, my family was there every night. We had a guest speaker for a week... I assume to *revive* us. But I can't imagine why we needed reviving when we were at church twice every week. Yes, we went on Wednesday nights, too.

I remember little things like one night, the revival speaker asked us to join hands as we closed the service. Since I was sitting up front, I jumped up and stood next to the minister and got to hold his hand! Nobody pushed me away, nobody said I couldn't have that special spot next to him. I was as important as anyone else in that sanctuary, even if I did talk and giggle through the whole service. Oh, and trust me, I thought I was important, too!

Life in church was a good life for me.

I told you we went to church twice a week but it was actually three times because we went *twice* on Sundays... mornings for Sunday School and worship, and evenings for youth meetings and another brief worship service. I *loved* youth group meetings. In case you can't tell, I'm a very social person and our meetings were very social. I'm sure there were some lessons taught (I think I got them through osmosis) but I only remember the social aspect. I got to talk and giggle and didn't get any whippings for that! ☺

As I grew older, I grew away from the church. I fell in love and only had eyes for my future husband. While he went with me to church occasionally, he never shared my enthusiasm for it.

I stayed away until I had children.

When my three children were young (4 years old and under) I went through a difficult time. I was hospitalized for depression. Now, let me tell you, depression is a horrible thing! I don't even have the words to describe it. I knew I didn't want to die but I also

didn't want to live feeling the way I did. I really thought I would have to live the rest of my life in that horrible dark hole. Nothing mattered to me, not my husband, not my children, not my church. Everything was "nothingness" to me. Life didn't feel real. I literally thought I was going crazy. I tried praying but couldn't and only suffered more guilt for that.

Then Jack Johnson, who was my minister at the time (some of you may know him – a wonderful man!), came to visit me in the hospital. I told him I felt so guilty because I couldn't even pray and he looked at me and said "Then, don't. We (my church) will do it for you." I can't tell you the relief I felt from the love shown to me that day.

I did get through that horrible dark period of my life. I learned ways to cope with depression and can say I haven't experienced that horrible, deep, dark "nothingness" since then. And I give all the credit to Jack. I know I should give it to God but I'm a product of the Disciple's church and good disciples don't talk like that ☺ so I give it all to Jack (whom I now realize God was working through).

I tell you all this to get to my life today. Over the years, I have continued going to church... not as many times a week as when I was little, thank goodness, ☺ but just about every week. Let me tell you "Osmosis works!" I went back to church for my children but along the way I began learning more about myself and my own spiritual life.

When I got involved with your church my life was really starting to change. Don't get me wrong... I love Bob Mooty and the people at Timberlake Christian. That's why I'm not a member here.

Big changes began when I met Vince Sawyer at The Gateway. He spoke very freely of his spiritual life which initially I found, how shall I say "annoying"? I wasn't ready for that kind of openness. He invited me to a Servant Leadership class here. I attended because I couldn't find a good enough reason not to... kind of how I felt when David asked me to give the "sermon" today... I couldn't find a good enough reason not to. ☺

It was shortly after I came to a class that my most life-altering event took place. My older son, Luke, came out to me that he was gay. Notice I said he came out to *me*. He didn't come out to his dad. His dad and my husband, Robert whom we call "Pedro", wouldn't have handled it well at that time and he'll even tell you that now.

So I lived with my son's news for four years before he came out to his dad. During this time, my church had a discussion on this issue and it wasn't pretty. But your church... oh, here I felt the love and welcoming spirit you have for everyone. After my initial "annoyance" with the way Vince voiced his spirituality, I gained a new insight into the love of Christ. Although at the time I couldn't say anything about my son, I knew that if you had known, you would have accepted him as he was and that meant everything to me!

Luke changed my life. I tell him today that even if I could, I wouldn't change anything about him because he has taught me to be more open, loving, accepting and caring. I've learned there are many ways to live your life and if you're living life truthfully for yourself and others, you are living like Christ.

I want to share one more story before I close. I've been part of another class here. We just finished studying the book "If the Church were Christian". It's a great book and I suggest you all read it. But one story in the book really spoke to me... no, it was more like it slapped me in the face!

It's the story of two women who ran a food pantry at their church. With great intentions, they wanted to feed the hungry. So many people were needing food they were afraid they would run out so they began giving out smaller and smaller amounts to people to the point they were giving each family a can or two of food. They hoarded the food for fear they wouldn't have enough.

When I read that I was like "Oh my gosh, that's what I'm doing at Interfaith Outreach."

We had so many clients seeking assistance last year that I didn't think we could possibly help them at the rate we were so I lowered the financial assistance we were giving them. I was hoarding our money for fear of not having enough... just like these women.

At a board meeting this past Thursday, I told the board about this story and that I realized this is what I was doing at work. Immediately we increased the amount of help we give our clients. If we need more, we'll ask for help and use some of our savings. If we use up all we have and nobody continues to support us that means it's time to close our doors because we aren't meant to be here anymore. I don't want to hoard our money for a rainy day because for the people that need assistance now, this is their rainy day.

So I continue to learn and relearn on my spiritual journey. And I thank you for being a part of it. Thank you for being an open and affirming congregation. Thank your for allowing me to share in your classes. Thank you for listening while I share my continuing journey of faith. Like I said I'm learning and relearning every day but the most important thing I've learned so far is to, as we tell our children at church, "spend time alone with God."

Amen.