

Oh man. Now where do I even begin? Well I probably should start off introducing myself. My name is Marshall, most people here at St. Catherine's probably already know I am, and if you don't, then you know my grandma. Her name is Marion. She's been going here for the last 45 years. And well I've been coming here since I was in diapers. Even went to preschool here when I was 3 years old. So I've been here my whole life. I can guarantee that a lot of you can remember me running around the church as a little boy. But that was a long time ago, I've done a lot of growing up since then.

St. Catherine's has been a huge part of my life. Yet let me tell you now that is an understatement. Some of my first memories are from here, especially from being a little kid who attended VBS, Vacation Bible School. Of course now I help run it. This is one of the few places that have never moved, changed, or disappeared on me. And I'm sure that most of you guys know and understand that throughout your life, people will come and go. Places will eventually be torn down and something new will be built in its place. But not St. Catherine's. She's done nothing except for remaining a stable place, a place that I can always lean on. I can't tell you how grateful I am for having the lucky opportunity of attending this church. I'll never forget this place, this sanctuary, and the people I've met here. Being completely honest, I can tell you that I would for sure be a totally different person if it wasn't for St. Catherine's. I am the man I am today because of this place, but more accurately; it's because of the people under its roof.

By now I'm sure that a lot of you are wondering why St. Catherine's really does mean so much to me. So let me tell you why. For starters, it's taught me one extremely valuable thing, yet complicated, but still simple at the same time. That thing is a lesson, a kind of lesson that everybody needs to know. And that lesson is how to LOVE. Wait; let me say that again, LOVE. However not just any type of love, it's unconditional love. It's the kind of love that we were talking about earlier in our gospel reading. It was when Jesus was talking to his disciples and he told them... "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends"... that love that is so relentless that there's nothing you could do to drive it away. It's always been there, and it always will be. It'll be there whether you're here, or not. That's one of the many amazing things I've always noticed about St. Catherine's. It's welcomed everyone new here with open and loving arms.

There's this phrase that I learned that a while back on my pilgrimage to Ireland that best represents this lesson. It's one of the many things that I'll never forget from my Youth Pastor, Mike Peterson. The phrase is "You learn to love the way you've been loved". And wow St. Catherine's, you've shown me nothing but love and love and even more love. Even when I had done nothing to earn it. So I love everyone that goes here. Especially all my friends in the youth program. I love every single one of them. They're all amazing people and I can not stress that enough. All of them are going somewhere some day. Some sooner than others maybe, but they'll make it.

This church has done so much for me and my family if it is obvious by now. One of the most perfect examples was when my grandmother had broken her hip about 4 years ago. She had

fallen and had gone to the hospital and then rehabilitation for a while. However I remember while this was during the very beginning of my freshman year of high school, that many people from the church had come out and visited her and offered to help out however they could. Now I understand that it might sound like something little, but it really did help us get through it. And the best part of it was that we never asked anyone to do anything, they all came running to help us on their own. You all came running to help.

Another great example was from just a little bit ago. Now most people know or have an idea, but I've basically grown up without a father. It's been about 10 years since I've even seen the man. And that was ok. I had my life to live and he had his and I was doing just fine. Even though I haven't seen him a long time, I have kept in somewhat contact with my grandparents, great grandmother and relatives from my father's side. Still would occasionally call them and they'd call me over the holidays and birthdays. So we all still kept in somewhat touch... Ok. Well a few days ago, Tuesday to be exact. At 6:11 in the morning I received a Facebook/social media message. It was from a name I didn't recognize. The name was "Amber _". The message read something along the lines "I'm not sure if you'll remember me or not, you were really young when I last saw you, but you knew me as Amber _. I'm your sister". Now let me clear up any confusion. I do remember Amber, she was my half sister from my Dad's side of the family. Last time I spoke to her was when I was 8 years old. So its been awhile. Well after the initial shock, I began to message her back and we caught up a little bit. We kept messaging each other back and forth throughout the day. I was so happy at first that she had contacted me, especially because it had been so long and I had forgotten about her. But I was ill prepared for the sad news that was about to make itself known. My half sister soon enough informs that my great grandmother had passed away from Alzheimer's...

t first I didn't know what to think. Although it had been a couple years since I had even seen my great grandmother, she was still one of the nicest, sweetest, and kind hearted women I had ever known. I always remembered going to her house back in Nashville Tennessee when I was little. I'd play around in her yard and she would always make homemade waffles for me. She was simply an amazing woman. I have plenty of memories of her, just not enough time to share them. Anyway I was actually aware of her condition for a while before hand. I had been meaning to go and visit her up in Nashville during spring break, but decided that there'd be another chance.

Oh how I regret that decision now. It was a mistake of me to think that there'd be another time. That was something I took for granted. I was so upset with myself that I didn't really know what to do. But I knew I needed to talk to somebody. So I ended driving by the church and ended up talking with Mike Peterson about for awhile. And then later on that night I met up with my mentor Jason Snape. Both of them helped me out immensely. But the thing that was so great about it was that they both were there for me, without any hesitation, without asking any questions, they were there for me when I needed it... So why would I need a Dad, when I already had two father figures right in front of me in my very own church.

Look, those were only two examples of how St. Catherine's was there for me. If I had quit coming a long time ago, then I wouldn't have had made the connections with the people that I have now. And those connections have made me into who I am standing here before you. My last name is different from the family I was raised with. Marion still goes here and both of her children grew up here. So I've grown to learn that basically your last name doesn't really mean anything. Instead your family is the people that have been there for you and the ones you feel most happy with. And St. Catherine's will forever be my family. Forever be a place I know I can come back too.

This church has affected me, affected my life. Not negatively, but only in the most positive way imaginable. Whether it was in just a simple way such as a friendly smile, or putting your hand on my shoulder when I couldn't hold the tears back, you've been there. Something my mom always told me when I was younger, actually still says today, is "that it doesn't matter where you go to church, but as long as you go". Well now you all know why I go here.