

**The Sermon I Wish I Was Giving Today**  
**Youth Sunday, May 30, 2021, 1:00 p.m., All Saints Church, Pasadena**  
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Let me tell you about the sermon I wish I was giving today.

It's funny and clever and insightful, that's obvious. More importantly, it reflects on my time at All Saints, on the friendships forged and lessons learned. It ties up what I've done on various committees and for a year on Vestry, which is, I hope, normalizing youth in positions of power at All Saints. It connects back to how I've gotten to preach three times before, once on my own, once with my friend Sara Baker, and once as part of a group of Chamber Choir members. As such – and I'm being so snooty, forgive me – it's not limited like the "normal senior sermon". Unlike years of youth, this is not my first and last chance to ever address the congregation, so I don't have to focus on only one big lesson from high school. That sermon is hopeful and useful and forward looking and probably includes me triumphantly but humbly stating the college I will attend in the fall. And, if I'm feeling especially slick, it even references one of the readings from the service.

Obviously, the point is I'm not giving that sermon. I spent about a month searching for it and panicking, realizing I didn't have it, not even the smallest idea. Panicking because I've got to do a sermon, I've got to. After being on Vestry, after three other preaching things, I can't drop the ball my senior year! Plus, I've spent so long watching each year's seniors preach and – to be honest – ignoring them in favor of imagining what I was going to say when it was my turn. I feel a little beholden to that dream. So three times before or not, I guess I'm still looking for my one big senior moment.

But here we are. Predictably, I don't remember any of those years of ideas. I haven't found my magic sermon. I've completely given up on tying a bow on my high school experience, or on my All Saints experience. To be maybe a little too honest, too many things have gone wrong in the past couple months, not to mention in the past year, for my high school experience to feel manageably giftwrap-able. The fact that I'm currently talking at a camera is the obvious example, and I'll add one other. The chance to brag about my future college has been taken from me by the fact that, with all due respect to Smith College, it wasn't my first choice, or my second or my third. So any time anyone asks about it I have to choose between being honest or accepting their requisite congratulations. And I'm pretty bad at giftwrapping regardless, I can never quite tuck in the sides neatly without the wrapping paper bubbling up in the middle. But on top of that what I'm supposed to be neatly packaging for you all in this sermon is an oblong, unwieldy, impossible thing to work with.

But I've got to give a sermon, and it's got to be this one. And just maybe that dream sermon was never achievable anyway. Maybe, in an indirect, clever way, this is as good as it was ever going to get, even in the best of circumstances.

So, if I haven't totally given up on this sermon, what else was on my goals list? There was referencing the reading, so I did that, I looked at the gospel for today, and well, here's what I've got for you all. Was I the only one who thought it was kind of funny that they mention that 'some doubted' Jesus, and then just move on immediately and never explain it? Man, I love making petty critiques of the Bible. But I figured, I should google it, to see if the doubting gets addressed later, or if it really does just get forgotten.

I'll just admit right now that I did not google it, and not only out of laziness. Also because, the more I thought about it, I realized, no I can't google it, that's cheating. It's unrealistic. Sure, the reading completely ditching the idea is a little unsatisfying, but when I'm unsatisfied with how high school ended, I don't get to flip forward and check if the author comes back around to it later. So why would I do that here? No, I'm going to take it for exactly what it is. And if that means less work for me to do, all the better.

Plus, what's the Bible good for if not being taken out of context?

That's what I've decided it's all about, that phrase, "out of context." I've come back to it again and again. I'm taking high school, and my college letdown, out of context. Everyone took COVID out of context. You're all taking this sermon out of context! It's not your fault, though, I forgive you. You have no choice, nobody does. We don't know what comes next, we don't get to flip forward and check things to make sure we didn't misinterpret them. We're doomed to never get anything in context.

Months ago, we had to pick our senior quotes to go in our yearbook. I really like quotes, so this was a big deal, to get the perfect one. I considered a few that were sweet and sentimental, because at the time I was thinking, "oh, this year isn't so bad." But in the end, I wanted something I thought I would always agree with, even when high school becomes a distant and embarrassing memory. I eventually chose something from *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*, by John Steinbeck. "It is amusing that at any given point in time we haven't the slightest idea of what is happening to us."

Amazing, right? I'm going to say it again. "It is amusing that at any given point in time we haven't the slightest idea of what is happening to us."

I could talk about every word in that quote, but I'll rein myself in and focus on "happening to us". It's a little exciting, but mostly it's ominous! It sounds like a threat: something is happening to you. You don't know what it is because your life is out of context. Something is happening to us, at any given moment in time, and we haven't the slightest idea of what it is – and that's amusing? Steinbeck has a gift for understatement.

But really, I like that it's ominous. It's better than empty optimism, better than everyone's favorite college platitude of "you'll end up where you're meant to be". It's not that there's no truth to that, it just seems so oblivious. I hear that and I want to tell them, don't you see you're inescapably out of context? Don't you see something is happening?

I know I haven't been hopeful, sorry. I definitely haven't had a triumphant senior moment. But if I can't tie a bow on high school at least there's got to be some value in recognizing that. In saying, I have no idea what I'm talking about, but it is good that I am talking about it! Especially because you all are not exempt. You're out of context too, something is happening to you too, whether you've noticed or not. So please notice, no offense but please know that you have no idea what you're talking about either. Because then when whatever's happening inevitably proves you wrong, you can recover. You can throw the gift in a bag, preach about how you don't know what to preach about, and offer it to everyone knowing it's good enough.