



Senior Sermons

By Jack Kelley, Maddy Bisson, Tristan Warren

1 Corinthians 12:12-31a

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” On the contrary, the members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and those members of the body that we think less honorable we clothe with greater honor, and our less respectable members are treated with greater respect; whereas our more respectable members do not need this. But God has so arranged the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior member, that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it.

Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But strive for the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

JACK KELLEY

Hello, my name is Jack Kelley and it is a pleasure to speak to you this morning. I am 17 and a senior at Santa Monica High School. Ever since I was in first grade, Boy Scouts has been a large part of my life. I think my parents go me into it and they have been with me every step of the way always willing to volunteer for the most unforgiving of tasks. All of you know them as Shannon and Michael, but all my friends know as is Ms. Kelley and Mr. Kelley. Now I am a proud member of Troop 2 and I wanted to reflect and share the gift that Scouts gave me.

I spent the first weeknight of my sophomore year in a middle school gym. As Patrol Leader for my Boy Scout Troop, it would be my duty to corral six unruly middle school boys for the next nine months. This was my first time meeting my Patrol and I hadn't a clue what to do. I stared them down, absolutely petrified as they looked to me to guide them through the competition stations we would be working through that night: from running races to building a makeshift tent to chugging a milkshake in record time.

I had tried unsuccessfully to get elected Patrol Leader the previous year and was devastated when I lost. But there was not a shred of doubt that I would run again. I was single-minded in my desire to take on the responsibility, as I was confident the challenge would change me; make me stronger. I had looked up to my Patrol Leaders when I was younger and I would not easily give up the opportunity to be a leader myself.

When I had been a Patrol member, I perceived the leader's position to be pretty easy. It appeared to entail showing up for duty and giving directions which I recalled we followed happily. Boy, was I wrong. That first night, I spent what felt like the entire two and half hours screaming at boys who would not listen. It was the most frustrating experience of my life. I couldn't remember why I had wanted the position in the first place. Why I'd run for it - twice! And why I'd felt so honored upon receiving it.

Something would have to change. And it turned out, the something was me. I slowly developed and implemented techniques that would allow me to rule the unruly. Instead of yelling at the defiant ones, I praised the listeners. I developed a list of specific goals for our Patrol, and called a meeting to discuss them with the boys. I decided to include them in the process of what I hoped would be our success as a Patrol. Personally, I wanted to receive the legendary “Honor Patrol,” awarded to the Patrol who had the most points from competitions throughout the year. It had been my dream since becoming a Scout in 5th grade. During the meeting, I shared my dream with the boys and as a group we agreed that we were going to go for it, even if it meant I would have to be tough on them.

As a group, we worked extremely hard to earn the title of “Honor Patrol.” And although it was one of the most challenging and frustrating experiences of my life, it was also the most rewarding. The process leading to our win had transformed my view of leadership. Where I had once thought that the only way to motivate a group of people is to be authoritative and use punishment as a form of motivation, I discovered that teamwork, cooperation, and including my members in the decision-making process while still having the final say along, are what make for a successful leader. Which is exactly what I had become.

Now I am on track to attending a four year university with hopes of getting some kind of financial degree or business degree. My top universities so far are UC Santa Barbara, University of Austin Texas, University of Oregon and University of Colorado Boulder and so far I have gotten accepted and awarded scholarships to the latter two schools. I am very hopeful for the future and excited to see what happens next.

MADDY BISSON

Hi! My name is Madelyn Bisson and I was baptized on these very steps when I was 4 months-old and was confirmed when I was 14 years-old. My whole life I have been at this church, and I owe a lot of who I've become to this community. This is where I've met some of my closest friends and my family.

But I haven't always been able to attend church regularly because of my busy schedule. If you didn't already know, I've been playing soccer for most of my life and as I grew up, the game became more and more competitive. And with THAT the game became more and more time consuming. Two practices a week with multiple games on the weekends on top of homework, a social life, and Sunday night dinner outings (and that's just club soccer). For 9 years I have been doing this. And as time has gone on, sadly, I have seen more of San Bernardino than the inside of this sanctuary. But every time that I have come back, I have been welcomed back with open arms and very few joking comments about my absence from Adam.

Actually, I was very fortunate to join my fellow youth on the service trip this year, centered in Slidell, Louisiana. We went because of Hurricane Katrina and the damage that it caused 13 years ago. It was shocking to me that people in the US had been living like this for so long and Elma Brown was one of these people. She lived in a trailer on a plot of land that she owned next door with her husband and their two petite dogs, which she called her "babies." My group was tasked with tiling the floors of her house. Before I go on, I want to recognize the girl who is up here with me. Her name is Scottie, she's my best friend, and she attended the service project with us this past summer. We have known each other since kindergarten (to which we are now seniors in high school). She tagged along on this trip and I am very grateful to have been able to share this experience with her.

The week was long and hard. The house had morphed due to the flooding and made sure that we never had a clean cut tile around the walls. Every single one had to be measured, cut, and placed multiple times in order for it to be just right. We would mix grout, lay it, and then seal the tiles when they dried. It took the entire week; most of the time, Elma was right there beside us scrubbing on her hands and knees.

Upon first look of this small, stout lady I was a little cautious. She had a thick, southern accent, and wore bedazzled tank tops. Although she seemed fairly benign, something inside of me made me think "angry cat lady."

Let me set the record straight: Elma is, and probably will continue to be, one of the nicest, hard-working, determined people that I will ever meet.

So on that last day, we were all dirty and tired. When we were finally ready, we surprised Elma by letting her put in that last tile to her new floor. As she did, her face lit up with the biggest smile that I have ever seen while her eyes filled with tears. That right there, is a moment that I will never, ever forget.

Now, I said before that this church has presented me with many relationships throughout my years and even before my time and I meant it. And although I have experienced a lot of great things throughout my time in high school, there have also been some moments that have impacted my life drastically. One family that my mom has gotten to know throughout her life is that Talt family. She was and still continues to be best friends with the youngest child, Jennifer Talt. I have grown up with this family and gone on many adventures and shared many memories of all of us together. About 7 years ago, Jennifer Talt and her husband, Ken, had a little baby girl, Brooke. She was this fiery little princess that had a good time no matter what she was doing. I helped take care of her on our vacations and family get-togethers. So when God took her to heaven two years ago, January, 10th, the reality of the news left me crying for weeks. I couldn't wrap my head around everything that happened and it took me a long time to come to terms with it all. I am thankful for the support that I received from the church through continuous prayers and quilts. We felt a lot of love during a dark time and it helped me get to a better place. One thing that kept going through my head was the saying that my mother always says; "everything always happens for a reason. God has a plan and we have to trust him."

A lot has happened since that day. And although we still have the loss in our hearts, we know deep down that Brooke is laughing it up in heaven with her Grandpa and many others from this church community. Because through thick and thin, we are always there for each other to welcome each other with open arms.... No matter where we are. And THAT is what I love so much about this church. I may not always be here specifically, but I can always count on you all to be here for me when I need you. Thank you.

Now Scottie and I have something special planned. She happens to be a very talented violist and instead of her speaking today, she wanted to play for all of you while I recite a little message to the seniors. This poem is very special and holds deep meaning. My mother, as most of you know, is a teacher at Samohi, where every year she reads Dr. Seuss's "Oh, the places you'll go!" to her seniors who are graduating. And though I have a semester until my mother reads it to her class, I feel like it is only fitting that I leave the seniors with that message as well. This is a rather long book, so we will be cutting out a sizable middle section.

TRISTAN WARREN

My name is Tristan Warren and I'm a senior at Santa Monica High. I've grown up here in this church, was born here in Santa Monica and went to Preschool here as well. My church community has been a big part of my life because of my parents and their commitment to this community. I was active in Sunday School, CAST when I was younger and also went through Confirmation. I would go to youth group and we had a lot of fun. We'd play games and talk and I will always remember youth group. Adam, Tricia, Emily, Dan and Robert gave me a good vibe, youth group was always fun and I always felt accepted when I was there.

When I finished 8th grade, I got to go on my first service trip. We went to New Orleans and I was on Robert's team. I remember it took me some time to become comfortable with everyone in youth group. I knew who everyone was - but I hadn't really gotten to know them well. But everyone was really nice and welcoming. I remember every day we drove to the work site in the van, singing to music I didn't really like, so I would just sit in the back listening to my own music.

The second service trip I went on, to Smith River, I had fun. I decided to dive in and fully participate and be a part of the experience. I tried to make everyone and myself laugh every day I was there and I'll never forget that trip. I was just so comfortable and was trying to have as much fun as possible. Not that it was easy. It wasn't comfortable at all - we rode for two days in vans, stayed in small rooms with hard floors and they had a lot of rules. One rule was to not use our phones, but that was a good challenge for me and helped me to forget about my phone and be connected to the world I live in.

I was on a team with Meg and Tricia and we ended up working in a community garden all week. Usually on these trips, you build something or work on a house. But we were given the task of weeding out a really huge vegetable garden for the Talowa Tribe to help feed the elders in their community. I spent the whole week pulling weeds and learning how to use a weed-eater. Growing up in Santa Monica, I'd never really done that before. It felt good to do something new and be outside of my comfort zone.

My Dad grew up in a house with a lawn and had to do a lot of chores as a kid, I never experienced that because I live in the city and not in a house, pulling those weeds at the garden was something new for me that I didn't mind doing at all. When we would have breaks I remember I would just sit back and take it all in, the air..., the scenic views, it made me relaxed. I really like being outside and keeping myself productive. On our team we worked with people from other churches and I got to know some of these kids on my team who were from different places in California, these kids were cool and different from me, we connected though because of the Youth Trip.

Then my third service trip, I got to invite one of my best friends Dylan, who has been my friend for my whole life. He was willing to go on the service trip with me and we went to West Virginia. Dylan is Jewish but not actively religious, so I wasn't sure how he would like it. It was new to him when we would go into a circle and pray, but he joined in and got to know everyone. We both worked hard and had a lot of fun. Going on a trip with one of my best friends is an experience I will never forget. Near the end of the week Dylan and I were fed up with each other but that didn't matter because when we look back on this trip when we are older, we will reminisce about it and have laughs and no regrets, I'll never forget going on a youth trip with Dylan.

I remember we stayed in the cabins and there were thousands of insects flying around at night and one of the nights we just couldn't take it anymore, so Dylan and I slept in the van. Dylan took the front and I was stuck in the trunk. I'm 6 feet tall sleeping in a 4 foot wide van. That was really awful because I had to sleep in a crawled up position and woke up with horrible cramps.

West Virginia is an interesting place. Its own culture with very different ways of doing things. The experience of being there and getting to know people who were different from me helped me learn that our world has so many kinds of people, so many ways of living and seeing the world. It made me realize how fortunate my life is in Santa Monica, to be grateful for what I have. I felt something inside that made me happy because of doing these great things for people we didn't know.

When the week was coming to an end I felt a rush of happiness because of what our church has done for these strangers. But by the end of the week, we did know them - they became our friends that we wanted to help because they were in a predicament. We fixed some of that predicament which made me feel amazing because we helped these people and their appreciation makes me feel really good. This is where God comes in, without God we wouldn't be here and God loves it when humans do good actions for other humans and that is what we did.

I've been skateboarding since I was young, in 6th grade. After school, we'd hang out at the Boys and Girls Club in Santa Monica and that's where I first tried skateboarding. They had a skatepark and even though I wasn't very good, I loved everything about skateboarding, to the boards, outfits, and certain skateboarders that were unique to me. In middle school, I started hanging out with these older kids and would film them while they skated, because I could only push around and skate. I couldn't do any tricks really besides ollie.

My dad had this fisheye lens laying around the house that I picked up and taped to my other long lens I had and then attached it to the camera and made it work. I've been filming for years now and even though I retired from that homemade fisheye and now have a decent one, filming has become something I love to do and want to continue doing after I graduate. Filming for these skateboard videos I make means so much to me and my friends because we are so dedicated to making a video and we put everything we have into it and when it comes to an ending we feel really accomplished and rewarded.

These have been my communities while growing up: the church and skateboarding. They have been important groups and people in my life. They're communities with good people where I've learned a lot about myself and the world. With skating, it's about being part of this group of friends who are connected because of this activity we all love. It's introduced me to different people who come from all backgrounds and places. I've learned how to stand up for myself. It has given me solid friends, taught me discipline and dedication, and now we're connected in the same way because of our love of skateboarding. The videos I make are seen by people all over the world and it's amazing to know I'm part of this global community.

The youth and service trips have also been important to me. I got to go to new places and see new things. I worked on houses ruined by hurricanes in New Orleans, outside in a garden for the Tolowa tribe, and on homes in the Appalachia Mountains. At the end of each week, I felt really good about myself and my team, that I was part of a group that helped another person and did a really good thing. For me, that's a God thing. It's about being there for people and helping each other.

As I graduate and pursue what's next, I've learned that I love to create and try new things, that I have a lot of energy and drive within me and thanks to my parents, I have a good work ethic in everything I do. Right now what I love is skating and film and I want to see where this takes me. I want to thank my Dad, Mom, Sister, and church family; all of my friends, supporters, skateboarding, hijinx, film and God. Indeed, God IS up to quite a lot—in our lives and in the life of our congregation. Just look at all that's going on. It's amazing.

So this what a perfect day to install our officers and church leaders for 2018. These are folks who have agreed to step up and give of their time and talent and gifts and passion and hopes and dreams to help guide and direct our mission and ministry. Know them pray for them throughout the year. They're a great group of faithful, sincere, dedicated fellow Christians. Like each of us, they bring a gorgeous variety of gifts, which they share daily with their family and friends. We are fortunate to celebrate and support their leadership today, grateful that they dedicate some of their time, energy and spirit to leadership in the life of the church. They're not all alike, nor would we want them to be. Together they create a beautiful constellation of leadership that will guide us well in our mission and ministries in this New Year.

As we move towards baptismal renewal this morning, I'm going to first invite our ushers to come forward now to receive our tithes and offerings. As the offering is received, I'd also like you to take out the index card that was in your OOW this morning and write on it clearly the name with which you were baptized, your Christian name, first and middle. Bring your card forward when you come in a few moments to renew your baptismal vows. The pastors will read from these, collect

them in these baskets, and then place them all on the altar table this morning, as a symbol of the rededication of our lives to God this day. We will also give you the gift of a small shell to remind you of your baptism. Keep it in your pocket or your purse—somewhere it will remind you of the hope of this day.

If you have not been baptized and would like to be baptized this morning, please just let us know as you come. In our lives and in our world, God is indeed up to quite a lot. Be part of it! Let the beauty and power of this day renew your life, ground you in the truth of your baptism, cause you to rejoice in the constellation of God-lit stars that guide you along life's way, and free you to know that, thanks to God, the star you most need for this season of life, burns brightly.