

Good morning.

When I was little, Sunday Morning meant Sunday School. I learned a lot there each week with my two younger siblings. We learned about a young couple living in a beautiful garden, and how life changed for them after eating something they shouldn't have. We learned about a man who built an enormous boat to save animals from extinction. We also learned of course, about the barn-born carpenter named Jesus, who was unjustly killed when his "radical ideology" made too many waves. Stewardship is a recurring theme across each of these stories, but I'm not here to talk to you today about tending the land, or preserving endangered wildlife. No, what I'm here to talk to you about today is walking in love.

In all my life, I have never known a better example of this than my late mother, Christina Janzen. My Mom was always doing something for somebody, whether it was bringing an elder a hot meal after a bad fall, or visiting people in the hospital to lay hands on and pray for them. For as long as I can remember, she truly lived up to her name 'Christina', which literally means 'follower of Christ'. According to her, walking in love meant treating others the way you want to be treated, helping people in need, and showing kindness *and* acceptance to *everyone*, *especially* those who were different from us. Her clearest demonstration of this to me, was her constant refrain that for as long as she lived, she would *always* accept my siblings and I for who we were, no matter what. Anyone who knew my Mom adored her and she adored them right back. Needless to say, *everyone* was devastated when she died eight years ago, after a long battle with various illnesses. While I received many wonderful things from my Mom such as her love for classic rock, or the red four-slice toaster she gave me for Christmas the year I rented my first home, showing me what it *truly* means to love *unconditionally*, was far and away her greatest gift to me.

As I reached adulthood, working my first job, paying my first bills, and starting a family of my own, I'd been experiencing a crisis of faith. I saw so many people who called themselves 'Christians' seem to lose sight of *anything* other than the so-called "abominations" of dressing the "wrong" way, or loving the "wrong" people. Mom, for her part, was disgusted by this, and when the pastor preached a 45-minute sermon exclusively dedicated to demonizing gay and transgender people, she never set foot in that church again. If this experience had weakened my faith, losing my Mom destroyed it. How was I supposed to be a Christian in a world where the voices *screaming* about who was and was not acceptable were amplified, yet my mother's voice, which only spoke words of love and reconciliation, had been silenced?

I had seldom been back to a church ever since, when I attended my first service here at St. Andrew's. Having seen so many claiming to represent 'Christianity' despite making targets out of first one sibling, then another, and finally myself, I was initially timid and skeptical. While those of you in this parish who know me have only ever known me as Katie, a woman, I have cried my eyes out so many times lamenting that the woman who raised me, and who always promised to accept me *for me*, never had the chance to meet the version of myself standing here today.

But I am so proud to say that St. Andrew's is where I belong because here, the golden rule isn't some childish thing to leave behind, 'all are welcome' is more than just a slogan, and each week we are instructed to practice the kind of stewardship my Mom always taught me. "Walk in love as Christ loved us and gave himself for us, an offering and sacrifice to God." THAT is what stewardship *truly* means to me. Unconditional love.

Thank you