

## **Youth Sunday Sermon By: Michaela Stockdall (7/15/18)**

Before I begin my sermon this morning I would like to play a song for you all. It's called "Beautiful Things", and it carries a message that touches on the pain and hope of what we're trying to express to you today. This song is a big favorite up at Loch Leven , and while I was there this summer I found a connection with it and wanted to share it with you all this morning. As you listen please take note of the lyrics and what they mean in the context of this service.

### **PLAY BEAUTIFUL THINGS**

**Sermon:** It's a beautiful song isn't it? I want to come back to the powerful message of hope in this song at the end of my reflection. To get us started I'd like to explain why we, as a youth group, decided to center the service around school shootings. Back in April we sat down in youth group and had a very intimate discussion about gun violence and school shootings. We talked about our feelings, our concerns, and what our schools do in order to protect us from a potential school shooting. To lighten the air in the room we decided to switch gears and discuss the

possibility of hosting a Youth Sunday. We all agreed that a Youth Sunday was something that we wanted to create together, so we went on to figure out a theme. Going back to our previous discussion we decided to focus on school shootings because it's something that's happening right now in our lives as students.

Being able to use this theme this morning gives us an opportunity to share what's on our hearts and minds with this congregation. We know how much you all care about the youth in this church, and we knew that we could speak about this with you all. Our experience of school shootings is something that most adults didn't experience or have to go through, because gun violence wasn't as big of an issue when they were growing up. It's important to us that we get the opportunity to have this discussion about something that isn't as familiar to you all. It's something that needs to be talked about because of the impact it's having on our lives, and it's wonderful to do this in worship together. Church is a great place for us to have this conversation because it doesn't leave us hopeless. It helps us find the hope even when it can be hard to do so.

Scripture, Christian traditions, and songs all hold messages of hope from God that remind us of his involvement in every part of our lives. God offers us words of hope because we need them. The word of hope that we heard in the reading from Isaiah is a reaction to a world of danger where children are not

valued. But, in this new world that the prophet describes it is the children that are leading the way to peace. The wolf lives with the lamb, and the leopard lies down with the kid, and they will not hurt or destroy, and it is the little child that leads them.

The scripture in Luke mentions that the disciples were continuing to replicate the world in which children aren't valued by trying to stop the children from coming to see Jesus. But, it's Jesus' response to this that reminds us that children have a special connection to God that adults should pay attention to, "for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs".

In 2 Corinthians 5 we read that, "we regard no one from a human point of view". We often struggle to not see everything from a human point of view, since we are humans after all. But if we remember that God is involved, we can imagine that something new could emerge. What does it mean for something to be made new? What does a new creation look like? Right now it might be hard to imagine a new and beautiful thing being created from the chaos of gun violence in our country, and we feel stuck because of it. We don't know where to go from here. Maybe we feel stuck because we keep forgetting that gun violence isn't just a political issue, but also a faith issue that God is involved in. What if we could remember that God is involved? What if we could believe that God can create a

new and beautiful thing from chaos and dust? What if we could truly claim our call to be ambassadors of reconciliation?

Being called to be an “ambassador of reconciliation” may seem a bit dramatic, but in today’s service we brought attention to a major brokenness. It may not feel like this issue is something that you’re called to work on reconciling, but what we’d like to share with you today is that school shootings are impacting the lives of our children in this very congregation.

The song I played for you earlier reflects what the youth of this country and of this congregation are trying to share about our feelings and experiences regarding school shootings and gun violence. The first and second verses express the pain and hopelessness that we feel each time another shooting happens. “All this pain, I wonder if I’ll ever find my way. I wonder if my life could really change at all”. The chorus brings us a word of hope that reminds us that God creates beauty through us. “You make beautiful things, you make beautiful things out of the dust. You make beautiful things, you make beautiful things out of us”. The 3rd verse reflects what is happening right now as our young people combat their feelings of fear with empowerment and protest. “Hope is springing up from this old ground” and life is being found through God.

God is working through our children who are already taking leadership and demanding a new way of life in education and beyond. The children are the future of this nation, and maybe listening to them is God's way of making us new. Maybe their leadership is what calls us to join them in answering our call to be ambassadors of reconciliation. Walk with us in our journey to find peace, and help us to create that new and beautiful thing. Thank you.