

Senior Speakers for Youth Sunday 2017
Notes on getting started
From Katie Lancaster

Wondering what to say? Here's what you might need to know to start writing.

First: Choose a Scripture Passage and let me know which one you choose so it can go in the bulletin klancaster@kuc.org

Scripture passages are listed on the next page, along with a background note and a question or two to help you connect to the passage. If none of these speak to you, pick a different one that does.

Second: a few questions to help you start thinking about how to share something about yourself, this church and God on Youth Sunday.

1. How have you been involved at KUC?

- Were you baptized here?
- Do you come with your family?
- Does your family have a history of being involved in this church?
- Have you participated in Sunday School?
- Were you active in youth ministries?
- Were you serving as a leader?
- Have you done service projects or been to special church events?

2. How might your experiences at KUC impact your future?

- What friendships made a difference?
- Who were your mentors, either formal mentor/leaders or informal mentors/adults who took you under their wing?
- What worship experiences were important to you?
- Did any of the activities at KUC change the way you see the world?
- What conversations were meaningful?

3. As you leave for college and emerge into adulthood, what bible stories or faith practices or memories will you carry with you?

- Prayer, service, taking care of people in need, and singing?
- Scripture passages you memorized, and stories you learned?
- A quote from scripture, someone famous or someone you know personally that helped you on your journey?
- A photo that "represents" what KUC has meant to you?

Scripture Passages for Youth Sunday

Choose One

Psalm 46:1-3 God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

- How has God been your strong and safe place as you've journeyed through life?
- In this Psalm, the author does not fear - even if the worst happens, and in this case, the worst would be the roughest earthquake or the strongest storm. God is portrayed as strong and safe - the place or person to which you go when the worst does happen.
- Psalms are songs from ancient Israel with a range of feelings from guilt to adoration, exaltation to utter misery. After thousands of years, we've lost the tunes to these songs: only the lyrics remain. And yet, these songs have a power to speak for us and with us today about how we live our lives in relationship with God.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-4 For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance.

- As you leave high school, which of these seasons have you encountered? How has God been with you through every season?
- In this passage, every season or situation in life is held up as equal. Everything that happens is presented as part of the order of things: there is a time for every matter under heaven.
- Ever felt discouraged? Like life is pointless? That little can be done to fix the world's problems? The book of Ecclesiastes shows readers that it's perfectly normal to feel this way. Rather than seeing doubt as the opposite of faith, readers learn that doubt often accompanies faith. In the face of human limitations, Ecclesiastes encourages us to enjoy everyday blessings, like good meals and close friends, as part of what God calls us to do.

Jeremiah 29:11 For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.

- How has God been with you through hardship and trouble? How has God seen you through into a “future with hope”?
- The quote above comes within a series of stories about the restoration of the people - an encouraging word in a time of hardship, and a promise that this too shall pass.
- The ministry of Jeremiah - who is the presumed author of this book of the bible - occurred during the Babylonian Captivity: a time when the People of God were taken captive and marched from their homes in Jerusalem, far across the desert to Babylon (modern day Iraq). The book of Jeremiah is a series of conversations and speeches about the tragedy of this situation and what God might be calling the people to do now.

Luke 1:37 Nothing is impossible for God.

- How has God been with you through the impossible? Has God made the impossible possible in your life?
- The quote above comes from a conversation between the Angel Gabriel and Mary, the mother of Jesus. Mary is surprised to learn that she will give birth to this holy one, Jesus. She is poor, unmarried, a woman: the most unlikely candidate for such a holy task. And yet the angel says “Nothing is impossible for God.”
- The Gospel of Luke is a story with a destination: it is a journey toward a final destination - Jerusalem - where ultimately Jesus will die and rise again. But it is a story that begins with the impossible: God-with-us laying in a manger swaddled in a crib, no room in the inn. Luke is the only writer to add these familiar details of Jesus’ birth.

John 1:5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness doesn’t extinguish the light.

- How has God been with you in the shadows of life? How has God shown you light in the darkness?
- This quote comes from the prologue to the gospel - placing Jesus “in the beginning” with God, suggesting that Jesus’ story is intertwined with the whole long story of God’s people, stretching across time and place. Jesus is that divine light that shines in the darkness.
- Unlike the other gospels, which rely on telling an “orderly account” of the life of Jesus, the Gospel of John uses language that is open-ended, with rich images that offer many ways to understand what Jesus’ life means. The Gospel of John has the familiar images of Jesus as the “bread of life” or the “light of the world” which we can turn to again and again to unpack and discover anew.

Romans 8:38-39 I’m convinced that nothing can separate us from God’s love in Christ Jesus our Lord: not death or life, not angels or rulers, not present things nor future things, not powers or height nor depth, or any other thing that is created.

- What things in life felt like they separated you from knowing God’s love in the past? How have you reoriented your life so that you remember: *nothing can separate us from God?*
- If you only read the first part of the letter to the Romans, you might think Christianity is about God’s wrath or condemnation - but don’t stop midstream - God’s love and a message of hope start here in chapter 8. Nothing can separate us from God’s love – nothing: not the bad things we do, nor the good; not the person we’ve become nor the person we were; not our inattentiveness to God nor our indifference to the suffering of the world; not our thoughts nor our actions - nothing can separate us from God’s love.
- The letter to the Romans, written by Paul, is considered a theological masterpiece, spelling out the good news of God’s love through Jesus to the insiders and outsiders, men and women, Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews). Paul has not yet ever been to Rome, and is writing to the Christians in Rome to encourage them in their faith while he tries to plan a trip to Rome to visit them.

1 Corinthians 13:4-7 Love is patient, love is kind, it isn’t jealous, it doesn’t brag, it isn’t arrogant, it isn’t rude, it doesn’t seek its own advantage, it isn’t irritable, it doesn’t keep a record of complaints, it isn’t happy with injustice, but it is happy with the truth. Love puts up with all things, trusts in all things, hopes for all things, endures all things.

- God calls us to love our neighbor: How has this church helped you live out a patient, kind, non-jealous, non-bragging, non-arrogant, non-irritable love?
- You’ve probably heard this passage at a wedding: it tells the truth about love. But, it isn’t just applicable to romantic love - this passage could be about friendship or community or family just as much as it is about marriage or dating.
- Reading 1 Corinthians from front to back is like finding a long email, and trying to make sense of it without being able to read all the other emails in the chain. If you can get past the disorientation of not knowing exactly all that is going on (or if you spend time studying what was going on) then you will find several key themes: building community in diversity, living and worshiping alongside people who don’t see the details of faith in the same way you do, and putting your faith in action – things we value at Kenilworth Union.

2 Corinthians 4:7-9 But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.

- What in your life has been most tender, fragile, or humbling? How has coming through that struggle helped strengthen you for the road ahead? How has God been with you through all of that?
- Our bodies are the “clay jars” Paul is talking about here: fragile, earthy, and holding something of tremendous value - our very lives. The fragility of our lives reveals God’s power, and with God, no hardship can truly destroy us.
- Reading 2 Corinthians can be a chaotic experience. Paul’s thoughts jump around. He expresses wildly divergent emotions - upset, in tears, confident, happy. He begs, is sarcastic, brags. But stick with it - especially to read his theme of suffering. Suffering, or letting your suffering be known, is so often considered a sign of weakness, but here, Paul is saying that suffering for the sake of others - and for the sake of God’s message of hope - is a way for us to embody God’s love.

Galatians 5:22-23 By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things.

- Who in your life has helped you live by the fruit of the Spirit? When was it hard to live with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control? How has God or this church helped you live out these virtues?
- You can tell the variety of the tree by the fruit it produces. And you can tell the major influences in a person’s life by his or her actions. Paul tells us to be guided or influenced by God’s spirit and to live in the fruit of the spirit.
- The letter to the Galatians - overall - can come off a little angry. The author, Paul, was angry because the people in Galatia (modern day Turkey) were forcing people to follow all the Jewish laws (including being circumcised) to follow Jesus. Paul is trying to convince the Galatians that all people are set free by Jesus, and that in Christ, there is a new law. All are welcome in this new way of living.

Philippians 4:6-7 Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

- When have you worried? When have you handed your worries over to God? How have you found peace, even during life’s storms?
- This passage comes at the end of the letter, where Paul is asking the Philippians to live the Christian life, even when it is difficult. Because we can trust God, we do not need to worry. Prayer and attentiveness to God’s presence will lead toward peace through Jesus.
- The letter to the Philippians was written by Paul while he was in jail (imprisoned because of his religious beliefs and actions). At the same time, the early church was facing harassment in Philippi (on the Mediterranean Sea, in modern day Greece). The letter to the Philippians describes friendship and putting others first, as well as encouragement for those facing persecution.