

Good morning. Happy Mothers Day! As most of you know, I'm Avery Kelly, the daughter of Clark and Kim and the sister of Kate and William Kelly. My family has gone to All Saints Church for as long as I can remember. I've grown up here, developing and fostering a relationship with God as well as relationships with all of y'all, incredible friends and mentors whom have been instrumental in the foundation upon which I have built my young life. And I can't believe I'm now a senior in high school, faced with the traditional Youth Sunday task of speaking about how All Saints Episcopal church has impacted my life. In all honesty, it is impossible for me to orate to you the full extent that this community has shaped me as a person. Not only because I'm not fully aware of all of the ways this place has impacted me, but also because in translating my experiences into words, the profoundness of it is compromised. It's a bit like defining our church as a pretty stone building on the corner of government and anne streets, you know, the one with the red doors! Though the words I say today will barely reveal to you the intimate expanse that All Saints has been a part of my life, I want to share a few memories with you all indicative of the essence of my time here.

I sing a song of the saints of God,

Patient and brave and true,

Who toiled and fought and lived and died For the Lord they loved and knew.

And one was a doctor, and one was a queen, And one was a shepherdess on the green:

They were all of them saints of God--and I mean, God helping, to be one too.

Those were the good 'ole days. "Big group" Sunday school, sing-a-longs, gospel games, morning sunlight pouring the windows of the choir room, musical instruments, skits, waiting for the day when I would be old enough to repaint the infamous middle school room, Ms. Irene helping us navigate the kitchen, Beckwith retreats, stealing candy from the 4th grade room and writing "I O Us" in attempts of moral compensation, Christmas pageants, Lenten suppers, veggie tails in the parish hall, swinging on the rope to bell that begins the service. These are my earliest memories of All Saints Church. I had so much fun, singing and playing at Sunday school. Then, crouched in the pew between our parents when the service began, Kate and I would draw, make shadow puppets, thumb wrestle, fill out the visitor cards, mess with the hearing aid devices, and undoubtedly fight and giggle the entire time. Those carefree days I enjoyed so much ended sooner than I wanted, with my Dad insisting that we were old enough to pay attention in church, a sad day I clearly remember. It was about that time in my life when my mom finally stopped forcing us to dress in coordinating church outfits, you know, the ones where I had the skirt, Kate had the dress, and William sported the shorts? I associate this era of All Saints with two specific memories. The first, in a humiliating scene I'll never forget, I hugged a man at an after church reception. This man was not my father, as I had expected him to be, but a random church member I had never seen before. Sir, if you're out there, I can tell you I was much more shocked than you were that I was hugging you. The second memory that defines this All Saints era for me is of my sister asking a question, a very relevant one to us at the time. Implementing the innocence and sincerity that only a five year old Kate Kelly could endear, she asked our priest, "Father Powers, are you God?" "No, but I'm a very good friend of his," Father Powers cleared

up, smiling. Hmmm, this got me wondering. Who exactly was this God we knew stories of? Were God and Jesus the same or different? As I grew out of my elementary years at All Saints, my own personal questions began to be answered, though more indirectly than Father Powers's clarification.

All Saints has taught me that with a firm basis of Christian ideology, individual faith is personally achieved. All Saints has guided me in discovering God, but has not told me exactly what to believe. We know who we are as people of God, although what that means exactly varies from member to member, because of course, no two Episcopalians believe all of same things. This is what I learned to love about our community.

As I got older, my All Saints experiences changed accordingly. I started acolyting, and even ungracefully fell asleep one time, as some of you witnessed. I began going to junior EYC events led by Valli. EYC adventures of this time included mission trips near Sewanee. On these trips I was introduced to true hands on service work as well as to the university I will be attending this fall. As the years passed, I learned the ends and outs of the classic EYC game silent football. I witnessed the successes of the first Bayou Bash. I helped with service projects, including a post hurricane clean up where I remember Tom destroying a safe with a giant hammer. As I prepped myself for admittance into senior EYC, our youth group started to diminish. It was actually during those controversial years at our church that I began to feel like no matter what happened, All Saints would always be my home.

And then came Avery Hall with her motivating energy and inspiring outlook on life. With her innovative presence in our church, All Saints youth group became an

essential part of my life. Surpassing the titles of “youth group friends” and “youth minister,” the EYC became some of my absolute best friends in the world. With Avery, we solidified our church family that had been developing for years. Bake sales, car washes featuring Elvis, mission trips, coffee houses, and Bible studies kept us together. It is Avery Hall’s revitalization of All Saints EYC that has incomparably impacted my life. With her, the kids of our EYC could face anything, even the Mobile zoo. Thanks, Aves.

Now of course, Catherine Mackey has initiated a new era for the youth at our church. I want to encourage the entire congregation to continue in full support of the youth program here. Its vitality is so much more crucial than I can even convey. I’m jealous that I won’t get to experience firsthand most of the awesome things Catherine will do with EYC. But more so, I’m relieved to be leaving knowing that more great things are to come.

I have one final memory that exemplifies my days here. It is the laying of hands ceremony we have at the conclusion of all of our Avery Hall led mission trips. In this ritual, each member from our mission group is surrounded by the rest of our group. We circle around the person, laying our hands on them and telling them how much they truly mean to us. It is one of the most riveting, honest, uplifting, and refreshing exercises I have ever participated in, and one of the memories I cherish most. During this service, our entire EYC deeply embraces one another, equally in spirit and physicality. It is a basic demonstration of true Christianity and of Glory a Dios. The most prominent feeling I have experienced in that service is love. Love spoken, love laughed, love cried, and love felt. And it is in this spirit of love that All Saints has impacted me the most. This place

has taught me, challenged me, and nurtured me in love. And for all of you that have loved this place and the people that define it, I will be forever grateful. Alleluia. Amen.