

Psalm 139:1-18

Matthew 5:14-16

Preached at Stone Church of Willow Glen by Kelsey Lax and Julia Kiplinger

April 30, 2023

## **Youth Sunday sermons**

### **Julia Kiplinger**

Hi, my name is Julia Kiplinger and I am 17. I am a senior at Los Gatos High School. I am in my third year as a deacon at Stone Church. I am an athlete at Los Gatos Rowing Club. I am an only child. I am an optimist.

All of these are things that I know to be true about myself. but as I am exploring who I am in the world, a lot of my sense of self is being redefined. I'm expected to choose a college, choose a major, think about my career path.

I think all of these things are decided by who you are. And as I am not sure of that, I find making all of these decisions quite difficult.

As many of you may have experienced at the end of high school and during your teenage years, there is a period of self-exploration and wanting to be independent from your family and unique as yourself. This is coupled with a key part of human nature: belonging.

Self-exploration is made more difficult by the pressure we feel from our peers to fit in with the crowd. A lot of us define ourselves using the places that we belong to, myself included. but it can be difficult to delve deeper and figure out who you really are. I've spent time thinking about this as I'm getting ready to go off into the world on my own.

Who I am today compared to who I was even just a few months ago is very different. I've focused on certain parts of my life, like friendships and experiences recently. I'm trying to make the most of the time I have left at home. When I look back at myself at the beginning of high school or during quarantine and I see a completely different person. More insecure and less willing to trust myself.

There are some parts of me that have been the same since I was a child and will never change but there are others that are constantly evolving. I will always be empathetic and fun-loving.

When I think of who I am there are lots of different aspects to me. There's a version of me in class who is quiet and focused. There's the version of me with my friends who is crazy and loud. There's the version of me with new people or strangers who is nervous and cautious. There's the version of me at rowing where I'm extremely competitive and dedicated.

I am all of these parts of me. I'm also a perfectionist and a people pleaser. I'm smart and a good friend. I try hard and care a lot about everything that I do.

Similarly, God cares a lot about each one of us. He put a lot of effort into creating each of us and making each of us unique. As I was saying earlier, there's an internal struggle between fitting in and being yourself. God made each one of us special and so to be true to yourself is to follow and trust him. Leaning into who you are and spending time with yourself is important.

One thing that has helped me to self-reflect is rowing. We spend a lot of time on the water, and it leads me to have plenty of time to let my mind wander. I mull over my days and the things on my mind. It has also helped me to develop patience and one of my favorite "rules of life."

I try to spend as little time as possible being angry about things that I cannot control. If I can do something about it, then I will. If I cannot, then being angry doesn't do much for me.

An example of this is traffic. I know way too many people who get overly upset by traffic. Yes, it is rather annoying, but no, you can't do anything to fix it. I feel similarly about world events. I feel that everyone spends a lot of time being angry with each other instead of working towards solutions that benefit everyone.

I think God meant for us to work together. I think he would want us to discover who we are and appreciate who everyone else is. He wouldn't want us to discriminate or have any hate.

I try to live by this. I do not hate anyone. I don't like everyone, but I don't think anyone deserves to be hated for any reason, especially one they cannot control.

I don't want to pretend like I am going to be a perfect person in my adult life, never hating anyone and always taking action when something is wrong, but I think the effort is important. Caring about what you do is important. Who I am is not nearly as important as who I am striving to be.

I hope that as we all seek out who we are becoming, we never forget that God cares for us and sees us as deserving of unconditional love, no matter what we are going through. I'll always remember that too as I journey through life.

Amen