

Morning Prayer:

In my time at Valpo, I have been thrown many curveballs. I learned more about my own self worth, I have gone through immense growth, and I have made lasting friendships united in shared values. That's special. I anticipate that there are many in this room silently head nodding in agreement.

My best friend, Ashlee, and I were talking this week about those moments of growth. The looking back felt like the end of a series when the actors come together to talk about moments in the storyline they never expected their character to do. We reflected on these fading moments that now seem integral to our Valpo experience.

From the get go, my decision to attend Valpo was a gut reaction when asked on Yearbook decision day where I was going to school. Just an impulse.

I believe that impulse was divine guidance. The Lord's plan all along was for me to come to Valpo, to meet Ashlee, to worship here, to grow as a person, as a Christian, and as a friend. Freshman year specifically was one of the greatest moments of growth in my own faith I have experienced. I am uncertain if that growth was related to being placed in a new space of worship, having common ground with the young people I was worshipping with, or a mixture of the two.

I often think about the very first Celebrate service that I attended. Everyone was called to the same room and drank from the same cup. We walked almost in procession to be joined in a holy communion with complete strangers. This was a surreal experience for me that still remains vivid in my mind. I am sure many of the attendees were seasoned Celebrate goers, having attended years in succession. But, for me it was a fresh group of humans roughly my age, sharing my beliefs, and called to share that moment. That sensation has not escaped me since stepping on campus in August 2017.

In that moment, at my first Celebrate service here, I felt we truly all were one in Christ. I think I cried after every single Celebrate Service my freshman year because I was so comforted and moved by the spirit in a way that I never had been before. Each of us belonged to the whole. That was something I had never experienced first hand in my faith.

We came from all over the country, and the globe even, with different majors, accents, friend groups, but we all shared a common goal for growth in Christ. When Pastor Jim says "brothers and sisters in Christ," I feel that unity. In my gut, I feel that phrase to this day. There is no greater place of acceptance than in God's eyes.

Here we all are, some of us a whole four years later. Still worshipping and praising in God's love. Still striving to be the best Christians we can be. Together.

This year has been challenging on all of us. It has been interesting to see which things remain steadfast.

Ashlee among others have been that lasting friendship since my first celebrate service. She was a constant over lockdown, because God put us in each other's lives for a reason. Through the heartbreak of this year, he gave me a moment of absolute clarity on the beach with my friend, Vera. In my time of greatest doubt and fear because of a modern plague, God spoke through her to me.

I'm still learning to ask for grace. But no matter my communal comfort, or current feelings, God finds space to reach us.

He always will.

Thank you.