

Let us Pray. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. Amen

Good morning. Welcome to St. Philip's. I'd like to first thank Reverend Donald for asking me to speak this morning. Donald had asked me to share my particular experiences with the parish. I know it took a while for me to feel comfortable doing this and he was so patient with me. I wish he was here today, but I appreciate the vote of confidence I won't scare you all off.

Most of you know who I am and my story. For those who do not, let me give you a brief background. My name is Christy Leigh Bettess Schmidt. I am 42 years old. I am a lifelong Anglican and Winnipegger. I have been married to the most wonderful man for almost 13 years. And as much as we have wanted to expand our little family, we have had to love and release 5 pregnancies to God, and 1 baby boy who was born too soon. Sounds like a rough way to start a sermon huh? Yeah, it sucks. I'm not going to sugar coat it. But I'm also not going to pretend there have not been rays of sunshine specifically from my experiences.

So when Donald gave me the option of 2 different Sunday's to speak on, I looked at the readings for each. It really wasn't hard to choose after seeing today's 1<sup>st</sup> reading. Let me refresh your memory.

It was our Old Testament reading from Proverbs and it is actually known as "The Wife of Noble Character". Yeah. When I first saw that, I was like "Pfft...done. This is what I'm preaching on." Because let me tell you, when you have been trying to have children as long as I have, this thought enters your mind CONSTANTLY. Am I not good enough? Who is judging me? (Well the answer is myself but you convince yourself it's everyone).

I looked up the current definitions of noble. "having or showing fine personal qualities". After reading Proverbs a few times, it's quite clear they are speaking of a woman's qualities and not her ranking in society. So let's look at some of the things proverbs tells us makes a great wife. Why don't we start with the one's I cannot check off?

There is a LOT about sewing and clothing and sashes in here. If this is how we define a woman, then I am in serious trouble. I can't sew. Ask my mom. My mom in law. Even my husband. I can't even properly sew on a button.

What else? It says "She considers a field and buys it". Talk to my husband, and he'll tell you it took us years to agree on a house never mind an entire field. This is something I could never do.

What else? It states "Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value" Well Andy has always given me his trust. I wish I could say he doesn't lack anything of value. The value of a child. It is a precious thing that has eluded us for more than a decade.

Proverbs says "she brings him good, not harm all the days of her life". Well, even as unintentional as it has been, I have brought my husband harm. We have struggled in particular with the loss of our son Daniel. And this next sentence in the passage hurt the most to read. It also says, "For her children arise and call her blessed".....so a noble wife has children.

If you'll indulge me, I'd like to speak about being pregnant. After 5 losses, being pregnant with a healthy growing child was humbling. I was grateful for every day. For every food aversion. For his constant movement. I embraced it all. I tried so hard to keep the fear at bay that something may go wrong and concentrate on the blessing of our son growing in my womb. I don't want this to be just about the heartbreak, but these are the facts.

He arrived too early (at 22 weeks) because of my incompetent cervix.

He was born and named Daniel David Schmidt.

He was born again in Christ by my husband.

He got to meet all 4 of his grandparents, and his Auntie Renate.

I sang to him as he fell into eternal sleep in my arms.

It was the best and the worst day of my life.

Another piece of my heart had left, and gone home to God.

The next hours after Daniel left us, blurred together. I do not remember how, but it was early morning and Donald was there visiting us. We spoke of having a memorial service. It seemed so important to have it figured out immediately. Like having control over something would make us feel better. I remember Andy being so very angry. Not at me. Not at Donald but at the situation and at God. I can't deny I was angry at God too. To this day, I remind myself you can love someone and still be mad at them. Even though it's been over 2 years, I can still remember Andy saying "Donald, I love you but if you say during your sermon at Daniel's funeral that "God has a plan" I may very well walk out." He wasn't kidding. He would have too. And I understood. So many times, well-meaning people have told us God has a plan for us. It hurts every time. Because although I know they feel there is something good for us in our future, I can't always see that.

And those. Those are the times I try to remember the kindness and love that was shown to us as well, in our time of loss.

For example, while still in the hospital we had a doctor come by because he had heard about our situation and simply wanted to give his sympathy's.

We had friends come to the hospital and drive us and our car home when we couldn't even think straight.

The food. My goodness the food people brought over that first week. I thought I showed MY love for people with food but our friends showed me up. We literally had a VAT of soup dropped off one day.

Daniel's memorial. We had no idea how many people would join us, just that we needed to have that time in the church celebrating and mourning him. I froze when I saw the church practically full. Our loved ones will never know how much that meant to us.

And Donald's sermon that day. That sermon has stuck with me more than any other in my life. He heeded Andrew's warning and did not go anywhere near God having plans. Instead, he spoke to the congregation about being Christ for us in this time of need. That this is when being a Christian matters most. To hold those people up who just can't hold themselves. And the most miraculous thing is people listened. Whether they called

themselves Christians or not, they held us up and still do every now and then. For losing a child does not get easier. The pain does not dissipate. You just find new ways to deal with it. To continue on and not always crawl into a corner to hide.....

And then you find others in that corner hiding. For as much as you want imagine you are the only one, there are so many parents who have lost a child. Even in this parish.

Okay, believe it or not, this is where it gets happier. I promise you.

More than once in my life, I have tried to ignore signs. That's usually when God gets less subtle with me. Shortly after Daniel's passing I had 3 people in my life mention this woman who taught yoga in the city, who also put on an annual retreat for loss mom's. I didn't want to hear it. I wanted to sit at home, whining "why me" and waiting for things to change. For in my grief I didn't want to seek light. When you are so deep in that grief it's like you're trying to hold on to it. Like a punishment. Somehow if you don't hold on to that grief you're insulting your child.

It wasn't until a co-worker bought me this yoga woman's book as a Christmas present that I realized God was trying to tell me something and I wasn't listening. I needed to go to this retreat. It wasn't for another 9 months, but it was worth the wait.

It was called Landon's Legacy, after Amelia's son whom she'd lost. There were 24 women there who came from all over North America. We had practically nothing in common except the one loss no mother ever wants to face.

You would think hearing about other people's stories would be horrible. And it wasn't exactly a picnic. But to hear all these similar stories, it was so cathartic. I wasn't alone. We had the same grief. The same fears. The same feelings of inadequacies.

We cried. We shared. We laughed. We healed.

And we were Christ for each other. To this day, we still are. Even though these ladies live as far away as Hawaii, I know they have my back. And I in turn try to have theirs. It is all a part of being the noble woman.....

In fact God has continually given me the opportunity to make Daniel's short life matter, and in his name too. I truly believe that. For just when you think you could not be farther away from God, he shows you he's right there. And he reminded me of that earlier this year.

Some of you will know that my husband and I were lucky enough to be able to attend a wedding for a close friend of Andrew's who just happens to live in the Philippines. This past February, we travelled to the other side of the world to watch a marriage. It was a weeklong event, with gatherings every day and night.

I remember feeling out of place a lot of the time, as there were children. These were people that didn't really know me. That didn't know our story of loss. I thought not to take any jewelry with me. Yet at the last minute, I had decided to pack a necklace that had the letter "D" on the chain, next to a picture of a forget me not flower. I remember being thankful I'd packed it. It gave me comfort.

Then God showed me the real reason why I'd brought it. Our second last evening in the Philippines, we were at a BBQ. There were so many children running around, I was trying hard not to cry. Then I noticed a young woman, someone I had spoken briefly to throughout the week. She was crying. I asked her if she was okay. She confided in me, that the next day

would mark 6 months since her son had been born. He'd survived only a few days. And seeing all these children running and laughing was difficult. Our bond was immediate. God put me in that exact place to be Christ for her when she needed it the most.

We talked for most of the evening about our children and our experiences. Our husbands joined us. Then Andy and I decided we needed to celebrate their son with them. So the next day, very early in the morning, they came to our hotel. We walked up to the rooftop and watched the sunrise over the ocean, opened a bottle of wine and toasted their son. Before they left, I had an epiphany. I went and found the necklace that I had brought. I needed to give it to Nicky. You see our son's initials were both D. Their son's name was Donovan .....

Sometimes I get a message from Nicky. She and her husband Avery live in Washington. Just earlier this week, she sent me a picture of herself wearing the necklace and thinking of our two boys. She even asked if I would share today's sermon with her. And this right here is a reminder to me. God has never told us life would be easy. Just that we would never be alone. And perhaps that is part of being the noble wife. It states "She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy". Nicky may not have been poor, but she was in need at the time I met her.

So let me get back to this whole being the noble wife. I kept rereading Proverbs this week. Trying to fit myself into it. There were things in here that I could see in myself.

"She is like the merchant ships bringing her food from afar" –so she feeds people around her. Let me tell you, if I relate to anything in this reading it's this. If any of you question this, just ask to come over for dinner sometime.

"She is clothed with strength and dignity" –well whether I want to or not, I find the strength (and perhaps just enough dignity) to make it through another day. On my lowest days I do it for my loved ones. On my good days, it's for myself.

"She can laugh at the days to come" –I will say, this is a necessity in my life and something I am grateful that my husband and I do together daily.

So basically this passage is saying a noble woman has a mind of prosperity. To move forward. She is not to be useless, but to have a deliberateness to her life. And faith. Faith in God, and faith in the people around her. And perhaps in this day and age the tasks laid out for a wife are different, but the expectations are the same.

So when I look back at that one passage now "For her children arise and call her blessed" perhaps I can imagine them with God, arising and watching. That is my biggest inspiration in life now. To make them proud. And perhaps then, I will be honoured at the city gate.

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, we thank you for this day. For this opportunity of gathering as a community to be Christ for each other. May we remember the image of Christ, with the child in his arms, reminding us to welcome them in his name. May we always be mindful of your presence in our lives. In the good times and the bad. To be the noble person, you know we can be.

Amen.