

## ***Susie Jennings***

When Pastor Kayla asked Council to talk about what Ebenezer means to us, and why do we come to church and why do we believe in God? I said sure, I'll be happy to make a talk, this should be easy because I believe in God and Ebenezer is my home church, a place where I feel comfortable and needed. In my work life I made plenty of speeches, so this should be a piece of cake for me. Well friends, my talk to you this morning wasn't exactly the piece of cake I had expected. You see, I had to talk about what was really in my heart and soul. My message had to be truthful in the eyes of God! For God would know if I got in front of my church family and simply blew smoke to make it just a good talk.

First I want to say to you that I don't believe I know more that you do about God, nor do I believe that I am a better Christian than anyone in this room. My intent is to simply share with you how God works in my life, at least most of the time. Please notice that I did not say all of the time.

So, here goes my attempt to be honest with you in answering Pastor Kayla's questions. Simply both my parents brought my

sisters and me to church. In fact, there were times when they made us come, I'm sure. We were here every time the doors were open. Ebenezer was our social life. Luther League was on Sunday evenings and as I recall there were at least 40 of us here on Sunday evenings. We were able to join Luther League after we were confirmed around 7<sup>th</sup> or 8<sup>th</sup> grade and it continued through high school.

Now, at my age, I know that I was blessed to have had the parents that my sisters and I had. Even though our Dad died when he was only 41 years old, he was very active here at Ebenezer. I remember he served as our Sunday School Secretary and Treasurer and also served in other positions. Sunday School was booming at that time. The year was 1963. Honestly, I don't know if I felt God's presence so much when Daddy died. I was 15 years old. However, I do remember that our church family sustained my mother at that time. She was 34 years old. My Luther League friends certainly helped me at that time. In fact, I still have friends from my Luther League days. I bet some of them might ring a bell with some of you. Remember Becky Killinger, Linda Bayer, the Potter girls, Mary Ellen Killenger, the

Groseclose girls, Johnny Barr? As I recall, all the girls had a crush on Johnny Barr.

Here at Ebenezer my sisters and I were baptized and confirmed. Back in those days, at confirmation the girls wore white dresses and we all said our favorite Bible verse. My verse was "I can do all things through Christ who gives us strength". It was also my mother's favorite Bible verse.

My husband and I were married here, many family and friends funerals have been here at Ebenezer. There are many happy memories right here in this room for me and my family.

Even though I can remember this church being filled to capacity with members, and now, not so many are left...one thing is for sure...we who are left are committed to being here. Yes, I thank my parents for their commitment in seeing that my sisters and I were in church on Sunday mornings. From personal experience I know how important it is in a family that the fathers take their children to church along with the mothers. However, I know the other side when the Dad didn't attend church. At Zoie's confirmation I remember telling her how lucky she is to have a father who brings his family, along with her mom to church.

Probably Zoie won't really grasp the meaning of this until she is married and has her own children.

The years I have lived, have taught me to feel God's presence so much more now than when I was younger. God is real but I'm sure you guys know that. For me, it was work getting the relationship I now have with God. Turning things over to God isn't easy. For me, to grasp the gift of God took my son living and working in war-torn countries. He worked in Kosovo at the end of the war there and then joined Doctors Without Borders and worked in many of Africa's war-torn countries managing their medical projects. His life choice of work was his own and I had no control.

Doctors Without Borders serves in parts of war-torn countries where no other NGO's go. For you see why treat the good and bad guys in their hospitals and clinics. Jonathan was in charge of the safety of his staff and medical activities. Like I said, I had no control over his life choices and I know I had to turn over to God my worries and fears. It is hard for me to find the right words for the comfort God can give. So why God?

Like maybe some of you, I have had many tough turns in my life. Finally, I know I couldn't handle them on my own. So my church and God became even more important to me.

Let me share some of the most recent times I have truly felt the presence of our God.

That Tuesday afternoon when I got a call from a friend of Jonathan who worked at the State Department telling me that the hospital where Jonathan was managing had been bombed. It was more than 24 hours before we knew he was okay, He has gotten his staff to safety. Yes, I really felt the presence of God.

Now, my son travels to many countries that can take 2-3 days of travel to get there. On these trips, when he leaves his family, I turn him over to God.

When my 4 grandchildren were born I felt God's presence. I could see God in their eyes.

That Friday morning in December 3 years ago, when I called the nursing home to check on my mother, I Called at 6:30am instead of my usual 9:00am time to check how my mom had done the night before. The nurse told me she had just come out of my mother's room and she would take the phone to mother

and I would be able to talk to her. Of course, mother could not talk to me – as I was talking to her I could hear her making sounds so I knew she could hear me and I also knew she wanted to say something to me and couldn't. I felt God so strongly at that time and the words that I wanted to say to my mother just flowed out of my mouth and I knew she heard me because like I said she was making sounds. My mother died during that conversation with her. The nurse couldn't believe it, I was in some kind of shock I think. God's presence was felt in my soul never stronger.

About 30 days after my mother's death, my younger sister Lynn was diagnosed with small cell lung cancer, the most aggressive cancer next to pancreatic cancer Dr. Davis told me. My husband and I brought Lynn to our home for me to take care of her. My son came home, Brenda and her boys came in to be with Lynn and to help. Lynn's friends were there. In some ways it was a joyous time although Lynn declined every day.

In my living room, in a hospital bed, surrounded by all of us Lynn died peacefully. It was 40 days after our mother died. Yes, I felt God's presence all over my body.

During the fallout and changes due to my husband's two strokes, God has been with me many times. I could go on and on but I have said enough. You have had similar times I am sure.

To my friends there are many opportunities in our daily lives to feel God's presence. We just have to let go and lay our worries and stresses at the foot of the cross. That is what God wants us to do. But don't we all want to think we are in control and don't we try to keep that false control?

This Christmas season, let us all try to do better about giving out troubling issues to God. Ebenezer is the best place to be a struggling Christian. The members who are left here can accomplish many needed acts of kindness in our community. Pastor Kayla is a good example of someone reaching out and helping others. That simply is what we all want to be and do.

So, my answer to why Ebenezer and why God? Honestly it's because my parents instilled the gifts of Faith and coming to church to the three Burkett girls. My mother and Dad led me to God.

Ebenezer is a place where we can all find God. None of us are perfect Christians, most of all me. We are a family of believers.

Ebenezer welcomes all people and our church is a place to learn more about our Lord. Most of all, Ebenezer allows us to be a struggling bunch of Christians trying our best to love each other, do our best in serving God and then really feel the presence of God right here in this special place on Sunday morning.

Simply, I guess, we can do all thing through Christ who gives us strength.