

I must admit that, excluding the last few ECY services, it's been a year and a half since I've been able to consistently attend church in person. That with the fact I'm still so new to Yale, I find it hard to believe I'm standing up here this evening speaking to you all. I don't have many experiences at Yale, so I can't give much advice.

And I'm just about brand new to the Episcopal church. Perhaps the only reputable thing I have going for me on campus is Alabama's chances of winning another national championship in football. But that doesn't much apply to religion, unless you live in my tiny town in Alabama.

What does apply to religion, though, is the reason I'm standing up here today. Because this community decided to take me in when I first got to campus last fall with open arms and open hearts. I still remember so clearly how I hopped on the Zoom link at 5 pm, probably thinking to myself why in the world am I going to church on zoom... at 5 pm... at an Episcopal church... I didn't even know what Episcopal meant at the time.

But I joined the zoom anyway and just a few minutes later received a direct message from Paul, our chaplain at the time, welcoming me to ECY.

A few days later I got an email from Melia connecting me with the other congregational co-leader this year, Andrew. Andrew offered to take me to Koffee? With a K, the best shop in New Haven obviously, just because he wanted to meet me and welcome me to ECY in the only in person way possible at that time.

That single act may be the most meaningful thing someone has done for me at this school. Someone welcomed me with open arms in the way I think Jesus would want us to do, over a great cup of coffee.

Which leads me here today. I think one of the core components of my faith is community. I, like many of us, need a faith group with whom I can share things with and find support. I need a group that shows me unconditional love and welcomes me, a place I can look forward to after and before another stressful week in college. From the very start, I knew I could find that type of community here, at ECY.

Over the last few weeks, I've really struggled grappling with all the experiences of the past year and a half and how to trust God despite all of those things. Luckily, I finally found the courage to share my hardships with someone here at Yale, our wonderful chaplain Ali.

Over breakfast last Friday, she asked me how I was doing, and I answered truthfully. I said something to the effect of school is going well, my friends are so happy to be back together, but I'm having a rough time dealing with all the stresses of being here and the larger stresses of

losing my father in February and I've found myself crying a lot recently. I just can't seem to shake the feeling of loss and confusion associated with losing someone I never really had in the first place.

And then Ali began to speak. And shared with me her experiences and her solace. And I can't really put into words how much better that made me feel. Being at Yale can be really hard sometimes. And it's so hard for folks to understand our individual experiences because we all have unique challenges and setbacks on a daily basis.

But I genuinely think ECY is a place here where we can share those things and find support. If only we have the courage to share them sometimes. Being from the south, I often find new englanders to be quite closed off from the world. You say how are you and they said good and you? And that's just about the end of the conversation.

You ask someone that in the south and next thing you know an hour has passed and you know all about their rude aunt who has been stirring drama recently. It's much easier to express everything on your mind down there.

But in all seriousness, I do think we should be willing to share our ups and our downs with each other. God is always there supporting us, even when we can't see them. God is always working through the people in our lives, like Melia, Andrew, and Ali, to help us get through this really weird, confusing thing called life. And more than any other time, God is there for us during our hardest periods if only we're willing to open up our hearts and lean on each other.

I hope that we can all find peace here at ECY through this wonderful community. I hope we can all get to know each other and continue creating a family that loves, strengthens and checks up on each other.

If Jesus were here today, I'm sure he would have asked us all how we're doing. And he would have given us the warmest hug no matter our answer. Thank you all for giving me countless warm hugs and for making me feel a little more at home at Yale.