Sarah Darrow's Stewardship Testimony, Sunday Oct 25.

When my husband Keith and I had our baby, who is now a very bouncy, active, and energetic kindergartener, it was at the end of a global pandemic, and the world was on fire- sometimes literally.

As I held this precious miracle- the baby I prayed for- in the middle of all this turmoil, I thought long and hard about the type of life I wanted her to have.

I knew she'd have a small biological family- we knew she would be an only child, just like I am. I knew that the village that I'd always heard I'd need to raise a child would be something I'd have to find. Maybe something we'd have to build ourselves.

Like all new parents do, I thought of my childhood and what I wanted to repeat. And one thing that stood out was church.

I was raised in a loving, affirming church community where all were welcome and where I knew I would always be safe- no matter what I was wrestling with as I moved through life. I remember being 13 years old and absolutely raking Paster Charlie over the coals trying to puzzle together the bridge between the acceptance of a child and the logic of an adult. It was tough on both of us, I'm sure, but he was instrumental in me affirming my faith. And I wanted that for Lizzie.

I knew that the right church would be not just four safe walls, but dozens of arms and familiar faces where my daughter would know she's safe, loved, and welcomed no matter what.

The question was- which church.

I probably only called 6 or 7, but it felt like dozens. I'd ask to speak to the head pastor, rector, big wig and explained our situation. That we were looking for a church home, but I wanted to know: what did your church do for the community? How did they help the unhoused and the hungry? How did they embrace marginalized communities and people of other faith backgrounds

or no faith at all? Not just accept- not just welcome- EMBRACE. The way we all know Jesus Christ did.

Most churches didn't make it past my phone screener. There was a lot of "well… we love the sinner and hate the sin" and some political tap dancing and everyone was kind and lovely, but it just wasn't what I was looking for.

After one false start, we found Christ and St. Lukes, and we invited Father Noah for what my husband started referring to as "the grilling."

And as you probably know, he took it like a champ. Answered all of our questions with candor, continued the conversation with curiosity, and when we left, I remembered my patient and kind Pastor who confirmed my faith growing up, and we knew that we had found a home for our family.

So when I look forward to our continued life in this congregation, to learning more and deepening my personal relationship with Jesus Christ, to watching our child grow up in this thriving community, my heart is lifted by the good works that I know are already happen and will continue to bless not just the people in these walls but everyone who walks by on the street as well.

And as my daughter writes her own story inside the pages of God's story, I picture her one day grilling Father Noah or Father Jared with her own questions to help her understand the world God gave her and her growing faith. We give to Christ and St. Lukes so that ourselves, our child, and all of us have a safe place to go to ask tough questions, to understand ourselves, our faith, what we can of the world, and the enormity of God's blessings.