

I stand before many of the same eyes and ears that I did 17 months ago. At the age of 23 I am speaking for the second time at the funeral of a child who has passed away far too young. Most people will live their entire lives without addressing such crowds. But I was summonsed here not to seek sympathy, but to deliver an important message.

Seventeen months ago Luke sped down highway 58 leaving Golden towards Thornton. His goal was to deliver me, like precious cargo; back to my parents who had just hours earlier learned that my sister had taken her life in the night. In the back seat of the car was Josh, no doubt in disbelief as the events of the day played out. The Salazars were the very first friends to arrive at our house that morning to console my parents. Mary, Luke, Rabekah, Jenny and Joshua. Their family was there for mine at our lowest point. Joshua saw everything: anger, guilt, despair. He attended my sister's funeral where I pleaded to the crowd to stop the epidemic consuming the young people in our community. But the message did not get through completely.

So here I am again speaking, not about someone's life, but about their death and about how avoidable these situations could be if we could just open up to one another. Seventeen months of searching for answers has left me only with more questions. However, for me, finger pointing has answered the question of "whose fault it is?" The epidemic of suicide within our community is completely and totally my fault. There is no question in my mind. But it is your fault too. It is the fault of everyone in this church, and it is the fault of everyone not in this church. Quite simply put it is everyone's problem, and everyone is to blame. It will take everyone to solve this problem. I am not saying that we wouldn't have helped Joshua or

Teresa or one of the thousands of others who kill themselves every year in this country; I am saying that we do not practice suicide prevention.

At a young age children know that when their clothes are on fire they are to stop drop and roll. They know to buckle their seat belts when getting into a car. They know not to talk to strangers. We have all learned how to say no to drugs, how to practice safe sex, and not to drink and drive. But I have never learned what to do when I am feeling depressed. We know to call 911 in the event of an emergency, but I have never learned the number to call when I feel like my thoughts are my own worst enemy. Suicide is a topic shrouded in stigma and misinformation. It is uncomfortable and personal. But so too is teaching sexual education to a group of elementary students. Education and discussion around suicide and depression prevent suicide, not encourage it. But we can't rely on our schools to provide this education, and we shouldn't rely on our parents either. This topic is something that needs to be discussed as openly with anyone as last night's game. Yes, maybe it will be uncomfortable, but look at Mary and her family, and you tell me the discomfort that you choose.

I feel guilty that I am using Joshua's service as a platform to communicate a message. But hopefully Joshua died so that this message could get spread. Hopefully his death was not in vain. Hopefully when one or two individuals here today who seventeen months from now, maybe more maybe less, feel the same agonizing pain and confusion that Joshua felt, instead of acting on impulse as Joshua did, they will act out of love for their family and friends and not cause them the pain that Joshua has caused his family and friends. Maybe Joshua died so that everyone in this church would spread the word of empathy, the word of understanding and the word love. And just maybe those words will fall on the right ears, and no one

again will have to address a crowd regarding the premature death of another youth in our community. In Colorado 700 people will die every year from suicide. It is the second leading cause of death for Coloradoans 10-34 years of age. More people die from suicide in Colorado than motor vehicle accidents. So instead of us being so concerned with our friend on his or her motorcycle, we should be concerned with his or her mental well being. It is up to us to educate and protect ourselves, and hopefully that will start today. I will leave you today with the same words that I left 17 months ago at my sister's funeral:

And for the Salazars, the really hard part begins. When people leave the church today, and the door closes on them for the last time they will be alone in their home and they will strain for solace. Peace of mind will come to them only when they are assured that no one will ever again experience the feelings of torture that they have experienced in the last few days. This is not the first suicide in the community this year. But it needs to be the last. There is nothing romantic, grand, magical, or poetic about suicide. It doesn't prove a point and it is not glorious. To anyone who feels overwhelmed about life my message to you is this, "Life is not intended to be easy. It is an uphill battle, and it may seem like a battle that cannot be won. But it is won, and our main combating force in this battle is our love for one another. Joshua had more than enough of this, but he chose for one second in his life to be weak, and now everyone will have to live with this decision. Life is so very precious and fragile, enjoy it- it is short."

So, my last words to Joshua are this "We will feel cheated always that you took yourself from us at such a young age, and yet we must learn to be grateful that you came along at all. Only now that you are gone do we truly appreciate what we are now without you, and we want you to know that life

without you will be very, very difficult. Your joy for life transmitted where ever you took your smile. Your boundless energy and curiosity which you could barely contain will always be in our thoughts. We all love you very much. You WILL be missed”

Please, please let this message soak in. Joshua sat in front of me 17 months ago when I spoke those words. Don't let the same thing happen to yourself or someone you love. Everyone here is loved very much by so very many. Tell someone you love, because if you don't you are telling them that you don't love them.