My name is Siri Kotonias. I am a Sophomore at Eden Prairie High School and dance on the dance team. I have gone to Immanuel Lutheran for as long as I can remember. God has always been a big part of my life. I have always absolutely loved going to church and praising the Lord. During moments, my faith has felt so strong that I could feel his presence. However, with faith comes doubt. There are many times when I feel like God isn't real. Like when we die, we go to an endless dark void. Doesn't everyone fear that to some extent? I always question these things. What is life? What is death? What is God? I think those answers vary from person to person, especially about God. Many people say that you should "fear God." It's not like I've never thought of Christianity this way. There have been points when everything I did felt like a sin. It felt like everyone was doomed and I couldn't even enjoy my life. But I don't like to think of God that way. Growing up, I always thought of him as a friend when I'm lonely. As someone to be there for you when you need support or guidance. This reminds me of one particular sermon, possibly my favorite of all time. A few years ago, Pastor Paul gave a sermon about his granddaughter. He talked about how he would take her to Nickelodeon Universe and they would go on this one roller coaster. She would be so scared until he would tell her "I've got you." And that that's who God can be. Someone who can look down and say "I've got you." When you feel like you've hit rock bottom. Whether that be the world against you or you against yourself, someone is always there for you, God. When you're crying so much that your head hurts, and you just want to go to sleep, shut off the world for a while, God is there. He is there to hold your head in his hands, look you in the eyes, and say "I've got you." I guess I'm not necessarily the "best" Christian. Only really turning to God when I need him the most. But it wasn't always like this. Like I said before, when I was young I thought of God as a friend. I would regularly talk to him throughout the day. To thank him, or just for company. I guess as life gets more complicated, we all lose sight of what's most important. I don't know who or what God is. If he's even real. But at certain points in my life, I do. I know that there is someone that is there for me when I feel the absolute most alone in the world. Something that keeps everyone going when they give up. In my belief, that is God. Having this rock to lean on takes away the worry of the world. In the verse that I chose, Matthew 6:34, it says not to worry about tomorrow, as it will worry for itself. And that each day has enough trouble on its own. God is there to guide you through each day, so that you don't have to worry. Everyone knows right and wrong, and in my opinion, that is God showing you the way. Maybe he isn't exactly how we picture him. He is said to be omnipresent, so maybe he resides in all of our hearts. The Lord doesn't have to be a fearful topic. He can bring people great peace. One more thing I will always remember: my student leader saying that everyone thinks you need a "key" to get to Heaven. This would be

things like going to church every Sunday or reading your bible front to back being able to quote it. All you have to do is knock and you will be let in. I think this means that all you need to do to find peace is to let God into your heart. God is there for you. It is never too late. He will take you in his arms whenever you're ready. I can confirm that I am ready. I am ready to confirm my faith in God, however that may look. I am ready for him to take me in his arms. To no longer worry for tomorrow. Amen.