

## **Hannah Miller:**

I'm Hannah Miller and I'm a senior here at St. Mark's. Will you all pray with me?

Dear Lord, I pray that you come into this space and let the words I speak today not be my words but to be Your word and give us all clarity to understand the message you have provided for us today. Amen.

Today's Gospel passage describes an impactful story of Jesus appearing to the disciples for the third time following Jesus' resurrection and directly prefacing Jesus' ascension. Strangely enough, even though Jesus has appeared to the disciples two other times and you think He would be a huge deal because He just rose from the dead, the disciples don't recognize Him when He first appears on the beach. It is not that they did not see Him or did not notice Him. The Bible says they did not know it was Jesus. The disciples did not recognize Jesus until He provided for them in the way that they expected in the form of successfully catching a lot of fish. Only then did they realize and exclaim, "It is the Lord." The disciples' inability to recognize the presence of Jesus is something that I'm sure a lot of us can relate to. Due to the chaos of the world around us, we usually don't recognize Jesus in our lives until He provides for us in the exact way we expect. Maybe not through a net full of fish, but maybe through Him answering a prayer, like a prayer for Him to improve your health.

When we don't realize what we don't realize is that we are living in answered prayer every single moment. We often fail to recognize Jesus in our midst because we go about our days facing constant stressors and issues we battle to solve. We face mountains of draining assignments at school, frustrating people at work, relationship struggles, and more. As these things pile on, we can feel helpless under the weight of it all. The opposite can also happen. We can be so distracted by the good, exciting parts of our lives and the chaos of trying to keep up with all our friends and all the events we want to attend that we forget to make time to pay attention to Jesus calling out to us. Usually, as this happens, we get so lost we cannot recognize God in our lives anymore. Then we are faced with a choice. Do we remain oblivious to God's presence, or do we ask for God's help and choose to trust His plan in His way? The second option sounds easier, but I find that it can actually be much harder. So I often find myself choosing to keep pushing on by myself without stopping long enough to notice that God is there calling out to me.

I experienced a period just like what I described last year.

I found myself encountering bigger problems than I knew what to do with, and instead of listening for God's call, I remained unaware of His presence. Then things slowly took a turn as I entered an environment where you simply cannot ignore God. I was called to be a group leader for a ministry that has impacted me so greatly called Happening.

And the weekend changed my perspective, and I began to notice God's constant interaction in my life again. Just as the disciples did not recognize Jesus as they struggled with the fish, and finally recognized Him when He gave them a solution to what they were searching for, I ignored God's presence in my life as I struggled until He showed up where I expected Him to.

Then as I returned to God and was ready to start following His path, I found myself responding a lot like Peter. Just as Peter covered himself with clothing, I tried shielding my true self from

God. Before Jesus died on the cross, Peter had denied Him three times in an attempt to protect himself from the consequences of associating with Jesus and a society set on rejecting and persecuting Him. Peter covered himself because he probably felt shame following his denial of Jesus. Similarly, I was ashamed of myself and my denial. I denied God's presence in my life because I did not feel I had room for Him in all the areas of my life and only looked for where I expected Him to be, like at church, youth group, and happening. So when I finally recognized that He had been there all along waiting for me to notice, I was ashamed. I attempted to present myself as a changed person in my prayers into the world around me. And we all do this. We present ourselves in a way that is only part of the truth of who we are. We do this in prayer, at church, at youth group, and many other places. But this is a waste of time because God knows who we are, and He loves us for it and forgives us every single time. We have to invite Jesus into every aspect of our lives. We can't ignore Him until He shows up in only the ways we want or expect, and we can't hide ourselves from Him when we are ashamed.

The good news is, even though we do this, Jesus always provides for us, no matter how inconsistent our faith may be. Just as He invited the disciples to have breakfast with Him, He humbly invites us in, no matter how much we stray. The Lord knows everything about us, and He loves us, no matter who we are and how we feel about ourselves and the world around us. Jesus will say in our lives whether we see Him there or not, and He will always listen when we do recognize Him in our midst and call out to Him. I hope that as we leave this room, we recognize Jesus no matter what season of life we are in, and not only in the ways we expect to but in every area of our lives and no matter how ashamed we may feel. Thank you.

### **Gracie Hammond:**

Hi, my name is Gracie Hammond, and I'm a senior at St. Mark's. Please pray with me. Dear Lord, thank you for letting us come together to celebrate us moving to the next season of our lives and be with us every step of the way.

When I first started high school, my relationship with God was at an all-time low. I was confused about religion, afraid of judgment from other people, and didn't fully understand who God was. I didn't know why I should love someone I can't see or hear.

I would go to church, but I would never fully try to understand what was going on. I was so consumed with myself and other people's opinions. I had no independence, no sense of self. I let these thoughts drive me into a wall. I was a tangled ball of anxiety because I refused to see God. I would hear His voice in the back of my head asking me, "Do you love me?" And it just sounded like background noise that I put to the side because I had too much to worry about. I saw Jesus standing on the beach, inviting me to join Him for breakfast, but I was busy being fed by other things, so I didn't join Him right away.

Then, about halfway through my junior year, I started to listen. I was ready to be fed. I opened up to God's voice, calling out to me, and although I couldn't quite understand what Jesus was asking, I answered, "Of course I love you, God. You know I do." And then I found ways to over and over again head to the beach and join Jesus for breakfast.

Just like the disciples, Jesus was always ready for us, inviting us to join Him for breakfast on the beach. I've grown up going to church, and He was always there. I was saying the words, but I didn't know what they meant to me. Over time, I started going to church more often and being involved in my small group.

I finally decided to join Jesus for breakfast on the beach, and He fed me.

Jesus didn't necessarily feed me fish, but He fed me, people, people who would guide me in His direction and remind me of the bigger picture. And as I began to understand more about my faith, I realized that He literally feeds me every time I go to church through Eucharist.

In the Gospel of John, this is the last time Peter sees Jesus, and Jesus chooses to spend it not performing a miracle or preaching to a crowd, but through the simple act of a meal, of having breakfast together. And that is how He meets us today. The good news is, God will never stop inviting us to join Him for breakfast on the beach, and God will never stop feeding us if we choose to join Him. So today, as we reflect on Peter's story and begin the next chapter of our lives, especially as we head into college, the simple act of Jesus inviting us to have a meal with Him on the beach will never end. Jesus is always waiting for us to join Him for food and fellowship. So as we step into this new season, let us remember. Jesus is already there, preparing the fire, the bread, and the fish. He is waiting to meet us in our ordinary moments, to nourish our spirits, and to remind us that we are never alone. There's always a place for you at His table. (No Audio)

### **Sarah Frances Magevney:**

Good morning. My name is Sarah Frances Magevney, and I am a senior at St. Mark's Episcopal Church. Will you pray with me? Almighty God, give us such an awareness of your mercies, that with truly thankful hearts, we may show forth your praise, not only with our lips but in our lives. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

I grew up as a much younger and only daughter of four. For as long as I can remember, each night at dinner, my family would pray and then go around and share our highs and lows of the day. We even made our friends do it when they came for dinner. It was just our thing.

When I was in first grade, my oldest brother Quinn was in high school.

After Christmas, in that day, my lowest at my friends wouldn't let me play with them during recess, only because I didn't have the same matching reindeer headband that the rest of them did.

It really hurt my feelings, and I was trying to share how excluded I felt. But before I even finished, Quinn just had to interrupt me to say, "Aww, poor Rudolph couldn't even play in the reindeer games."

Everyone laughed at the table while I cried.

I know it sounds silly, but six-year-old me was afraid that not only did my friends not love me, but maybe my brother didn't love me either.

In this passage, after the fishing miracle, Jesus asked Peter, "Do you love me?" In my theology class at school, we talked a lot about how Jesus was both fully divine and fully human. Being human, Jesus understood that Peter was afraid, both when he denied Jesus and after the resurrection. After the Last Supper, Peter denied Jesus three times. And here, Jesus asked Peter, "Not once, not twice, but three times. Do you love me?"

Each time he asks, Peter seems to be more frustrated. Why would Jesus keep asking if he already knew the answer? Because Jesus wanted Peter to know that love isn't just something that you would say, it is also something that you do. It is the way that you act in the world.

One of the highlights of the third grade at St. Mark's Day School was all of the field trips. The last one was to Fort Caroline. By this time, Quinn was in college, but because the field trip happened after he was home for the summer, he volunteered to go with me as a chaperone. And we had so much fun. There was when I realized that while Quinn didn't always verbalize how much he loved me when it mattered, he showed me how much he loved me by what he did for me.

Jesus understands that because Peter denied Jesus,

he is having a crisis of faith and helped Peter to see that loving Jesus looks like loving others, like feeding sheep.

Like Peter, we also deny Jesus. When we sin, when we turn away from God and do not seek to be reconciled with him, we deny Jesus.

When, like Peter, our actions don't reflect our faith, when we are unkind to others, when we ignore others, when we fail to care for others, we deny Jesus.

Faith isn't just the way we talk the talk, it's how we walk the walk. Jesus asks us over and over, "Do you love me?" giving us the opportunity to show him how much.

And that is the good news. God loves us so much, he responds to our fear, our lack of faith, our denial of him with grace and forgiveness. Jesus will continue to be present in our lives, even when we doubt.

Jesus will provide for us over and over.

This broken world is full of opportunities to feed his sheep. When someone asks, "Do you love me?" Don't just tell them you love them, show them you love them, just like you do for Jesus. Amen.