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## *Youth Sunday Sermon – Hillis Kopecky*

**A sermon by Hillis Kopecky**  
**Youth Sunday – The Seventh Sunday of Easter, Year B**

Good morning, and happy mothers day!

My name is Hillis Kopecky: I am a graduating senior at Westminster, and I will be attending the United States Naval Academy in the fall.

Today I'm going to be sharing with you a little about my journey in faith.

Like many of you, I grew up in the Episcopal church. I fondly remember Sunday's as a child in Columbia, South Carolina. For me church was fun, I was with my family, and I enjoyed the music. That was about the limit of my knowledge. Outside of that, all I understood about the service was that there was a big song at the end, and then I got to ring the church bell with the other kids. I was an active participant, but I never stopped to wonder about God, or what anything I was hearing meant. To be fair, I'm not sure if it's expected for a kindergartener to do so...

Several years later, I had joined the church choir with a few of my friends. In doing so, I became much more involved in the Church, and I felt closer to God. Instead of losing focus during the sermons as I used to, I was interested in what was being said. I wanted to hear about other people's experiences with God.

Instead of mumbling the prayers pretending that I knew them, I made a point to learn the phrases and what they meant. All in all, this was kind of a turning point in my spiritual life. Just as all of this was falling into place, a momentous event happened in my life. My family was moving.

I had been in Columbia, SC all of my life. In fact, there was a time when I thought that South Carolina was a country, but that's a different story. I was moving somewhere where I didn't know anyone, and no one knew me.

A year passes post-move, my siblings and I have had time to get settled here, and we realize that many of our friends from school went to St. Philip's.

My parents, knowing this, decided we should attend a service at The Cathedral. A few services and EYC meetings later, I felt I was re-gaining the faith community I once had. I had friends who would encourage me to come to events with EYC, and I felt like I had a personal connection to the Church. I felt I was once again starting to strengthen my connection with God. A few years down the line and I am deeply involved with the EYC community here. From ski trips to bible studies, I enjoyed taking time out of my week to come to church and spend time with my friends, while also learning more about God, and growing my connection to him.

At this point I was looking forward to the day when I would be confirmed. I had gone through the classes and felt that I had learned so much about what it meant to be a member of this church, and I was eager to formally join. Just as all this was beginning to hit its peak, and I felt closer to this community and to my faith, covid hit. The world I knew shut down. And once again, what looked like another setback to my journey.

Covid was bad enough for an 8th grade boy, I couldn't see my friends, and had to sit on a computer all day for school. My family had another situation to deal with though. A week after the lockdown started, my dad had to go to the doctor for throat pain. A few days later when the biopsy results came back, I heard the last words any child would want to hear regarding their parents' health: cancer.

Now fortunately for my family, if you had to get cancer, this was what you wanted. The treatment had a high success rate, and we had caught it early. To add to the relief was that the best treatment in the nation for this cancer was available here at Emory. So we were very fortunate to begin with, but that only did so much to help our minds, it was still cancer.

I am the oldest child. Throughout my family's move to Atlanta and other hardships my younger sisters had looked to me to have answers, or some way to help. When we got the diagnosis, I didn't know what to do, or how to move forward. I felt powerless, weak. So I fell back on the only thing I knew could possibly help, my faith. When I was going through confirmation classes here I was given a book of common prayer, so that night I pulled it out of my dresser, and began searching. I found a prayer for health and healing, and from that night on I added it to my prayers every time I went to bed.

I desperately needed a distraction from the world at this point, and so I fell back on another pillar of my raising, fishing. I had always enjoyed the outdoors, fishing especially, but I didn't really know much on my own. So I learned through youtube and other resources online. Before I knew it I was planning trips and scouting water on maps. Sure fishing itself was fun, but I had discovered there was more than just the act itself. Up until this point in my life I didn't really feel like I interacted with God directly. I prayed every night, went to church as often as I could, but I felt there was something I was missing.

Being outside and witnessing God's intentional design of the world around us was that missing piece. Everytime I stepped outside, rod in hand, I couldn't help but admire the beauty of the world God has created for us all. I developed a deep appreciation for the vibrant colors of trees and flowers on the river, and the enchanting lure of flowing water. Everytime I held a trout, vibrant in color, with splotches that looked hand painted, I saw it as a reminder that God wants us to be happy. My realization on the water translated to my daily life, and I made a point to search for God in the little things. From a sunset that paints the sky, to the light glinting through the leaves on a cool day. It was the clarity of the river, and the peace that came with being in his creation. I felt I was connecting with God on a daily basis, and I felt grateful, and fulfilled by all of his small blessings that we may often overlook.

Of all the little blessings I began to notice, there is one that still sticks with me to this day.

Two years had passed since my father's cancer treatment started, and it was finally coming to an end. That in and of itself was amazing, and I was grateful that we were closing that chapter for good. What really stuck with me though were the comments. Family friends, even my father's doctors said that he had made a miraculous recovery. That he had regained his strength and liveliness much faster than is normally expected after chemo and radiation. And I couldn't help but feel that this was one of those blessings. For two years I had said the same prayer, every night. There I stood hearing his recovery described as a "miracle", something that shouldn't have happened the way it did.

All I ask is that you go out and look for God in the little things in life, and have faith that he wants you to be happy in this world.