

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH
COMPASS, PA

January 18, 2026 – SECOND SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY, YR. A

The Rev. Dr. Nina George-Hacker

Sermon: “*Abiding in Christ—Together*”

Isaiah 49:1-7 (God will give Christ to the world as a light to the nations)
Psalm 40:1-12 (I waited patiently for the Lord who did not withhold His compassion)
1 Corinthians 1:1-9 (The grace of our Lord Jesus will strengthen us)
St. John 1:29-42 (John the Baptist declares Jesus the Lamb of God who takes away sin)

In today’s Gospel lesson, often the testimony of John the Baptist is understood to be the epiphany in this story. When John sees Jesus, he exclaims, “Look, here is the lamb of God.” I imagine the words bursting forth almost as if he cannot contain himself. He can’t curb his enthusiasm because right in front of him is the physical manifestation of God’s mercy and grace. Of course, this news has to be shared. It’s just too good, too important to keep to himself. And yet there is a second moment in this story that is also an epiphany, perhaps a quieter one, but just as revelatory. After John testifies, Jesus asks John’s followers, “What are you looking for?” Or another translation from the Greek is, “What are you seeking?”*

Since these are the first words of Jesus in St. John’s gospel, they are more than significant. “What are you looking for? What are you seeking?” There’s certainly no easy answer. So, perhaps it’s not entirely surprising that John the Baptist’s disciples respond with another question. They respectfully address Jesus as “Rabbi”—Teacher. “Where are you staying?” Why would that matter? Could they learn more about Him in a residential context? Jesus replies with a simple, “Come and see.” And here’s the second epiphany in the story. These disciples of the Baptist decide to pick up and follow Jesus instead. And, affirming the path they are choosing, Jesus calls them to follow Him. Perhaps their reaction isn’t as dramatic as John’s testimony—we already know the Baptist has a flare for the theatrical. Yet it is one thing to behold Jesus with the revelation from on High as John did, and it’s another to place one’s trust in this man they’ve just met, leave everything behind, and set out on a new journey together. This is another kind of revelation: the divine power and charisma with which Jesus attracted people, something we will see again and again throughout His ministry.

Andrew and his brother Simon were the very first to take such a brave leap of faith. A wise pastor once said, “A leap of faith is bit like a high wire artist at the circus doing amazing feats in front of the crowd. The ringmaster asks the crowd, ‘Who believes this man can ride a unicycle on a tightrope high above the big top?’ Almost everyone’s hand goes up. The ringmaster then asks, ‘Who believes that he can do this with someone on his shoulders?’ Only a few hands go down. The ringmaster then asks a third question, ‘Who would like to be the first to volunteer to be on his shoulders?’” That’s difference between belief and faith. You can believe in something and remain in your seat, simply raising your hand. But to make a leap of faith, you have to get out of your seat and actively place your trust in another.

Andrew and Peter are the ones brave enough to get out of their seats—or their boats, as it were—to join Jesus in both hardships and the miraculous. By inviting these disciples to “come and see,” Jesus does not define the journey by its destination. It’s more about how they get there than where or when they will arrive.

So, exactly how does one set out on this journey of following Christ? Perhaps the answer *can* be found in the disciples’ first question, “Where are you staying?” Another translation of the Greek verb would be “Where are you *abiding*?” It’s almost as if the disciples already know the answer to their question, because journeys of faith necessitate abiding with Jesus, staying with Jesus—wherever He may lead.

Like those early followers of Christ, the path set out before *us* is also unknown and uncertain. This journey of following Christ and discovering what we are looking for, what we are seeking, requires first wholehearted prayer. “What are you seeking?” is a question we often fleetingly ponder around this time as we turn the page to a new year. We tend to think about what we’d rather say good riddance to, and what we want to embrace and welcome in the year to come. This may seem like a time-worn New Year’s ritual, but those kinds of “goodbye or hello” decisions are where Jesus sought to connect with people—at the point of *their* long-held questions, and deepest longings. So, what are *you* longing for, deep inside?

Christian writer Debie Thomas observes that the selves we present to the world are messy and layered. And it takes time and patience to sift through those layers. But God sifts through the fumbling and the fears and the

doubts to arrive at the heart of how He truly sees us, knows us, and claims us as His beloved. And hopefully, through prayer, we can begin to see ourselves as Christ sees us, more graciously, more lovingly, more completely. It is in that way Christ looked at Simon and saw Peter, the rock upon whom His kingdom on earth would be founded. And when we, too, come to know the joy of being deeply seen, truly known, and unconditionally loved, that's when we can begin to see each other in a similar light.

This brings us to the second necessity for following Christ. Since this journey comes with no directions, map, or set destination, it is easy to lose our way. We are all bound to do that at some point, since we are only human. Even prayer can feel murky at times. And this is when we must turn to fellow believers to ask for directions. We're only going to get there together.

Professor of Biblical Preaching and theologian Karoline Lewis observes that the calling of the disciples is not complete until their witness brings others to Jesus. Andrew models this in today's Gospel story. He runs to his brother declaring, "We have found the Messiah," which prompts Simon to come to Jesus. To experience the grace, the redeeming love, the peace that surpasses all understanding that comes from abiding in Christ is connected to how we share that grace, love, and peace with others.

During this season of Epiphany, the focus is on the revelation that Christ is the Messiah, the Anointed One, the Son of God. And it's easy for the spotlight to remain there—on Jesus' prophetic sermons, compelling stories, miracles, and life-changing healings. Yet Jesus Himself reminds us again and again that His life, ministry, death, and even His resurrection are not the whole picture. For God's kingdom to thrive here on earth, each and every one of us must take up our role in the story of God's redeeming love. One theologian writes, "Collective liberation claims that all life is ... inseparable, permeable, eternally woven together. It rejects individualism and celebrates collaboration, and it acknowledges the difficulty of the fact that we need one another." In other words, our struggles, our successes, and "working out our salvation" (as St. Paul says in Philippians 2:12) are inexorably bound up with each other's existence.

That is why it is so important for us to come together frequently as the Body of Christ, the church, the faith community of St. John's, Compass. Our love and care for one another as members of this parish family necessitates our praying together, working together, and at times, bearing one another's burdens. And that requires *paying attention*. Finding out how each other is doing. Checking up on our fellow church member's joys and concerns. Asking how they are, what they need, how we can offer help, or pray for them. Our Annual Meeting is a good reminder each year of why we are here, and what the Lord has called us to do and be, on this historic hill in Compass, Pennsylvania.

In Ephesians 4:16 (EASY), St. Paul writes of the Church that Christ, "As its head ... helps the whole body to grow well. Each part joins with the other parts so that the whole body becomes strong. As each separate part does its proper work, we love each other more and more." Moreover, St. Peter reminds us (1 Peter 4:10 ISV) "As good servant managers of God's grace in its various forms," we are to "serve one another with the gift each of us [have] received." And that's why we have different Ministry Teams—Worship, Outreach, Property, Cemetery, and 300th Anniversary—so that each of us can serve one another with the gifts, talents, resources, and abilities God has given us.

Let me remind you of the promise given us in today's Epistle reading. St. Paul writes: "I give thanks to my God always for you because of the grace of God that has been given you in Christ Jesus, for in every way you have been enriched in Him, in speech and knowledge of every kind—just as the testimony of Christ has been strengthened among you—so that you are not lacking in any spiritual gift as you wait for the revealing of our Lord Jesus Christ. He will also strengthen you to the end, so that you may be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God is faithful" (1 Corinthians 1:4-9a NRSV).

In this bruised and broken world, it can be too easy to stumble and fall, or to wander from the path, in our journey of following Christ. So, we learn to ask each other, "What are we seeking?" And then, to find where Christ is staying, *together*. And then, perhaps we won't simply witness or read about epiphanies, but just maybe, by abiding *with* and *in* Jesus, *our lives* will become epiphanies, bright and shining revelations of God's mercy and justice, love and peace, comfort and joy, right in our midst. *Amen*.