

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

We live in a world that often tells us there is no other way—no other way than conflict, division, retaliation, or withdrawal into our own corners. Nations wage war, communities fracture, families quarrel, and even congregations can find themselves pulled apart by competing loyalties and voices. Into that reality, the scripture readings for the Third Sunday after Epiphany speak a clear and hopeful word: *there is another way*.

Isaiah proclaims light breaking into deep darkness, joy rising where despair once ruled. The psalmist dares to confess, “The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear?” This is not naïve optimism. It is faith born amid threat, uncertainty, and real struggle. God’s light does not wait for the darkness to disappear; it shines precisely there.

In Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus begins his public ministry not with force, but with a surprising decision: he withdraws. When John the Baptist is arrested and tension escalates, Jesus steps away from the path of confrontation and instead announces, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” His withdrawal is not weakness. It signals a different kind of reign—a kingdom shaped not by violence or domination, but by mercy, healing, and self-giving love. From that place, Jesus calls ordinary people—fishermen with nets and boats—to follow him into this new way.

We might imagine their hesitation. They likely wanted nothing more than a simple, predictable life. Yet Jesus’ call interrupts what is familiar and safe. “Follow me,” he says, and suddenly everything is reoriented. The Apostle Paul names the tension this creates in the church at Corinth: our instinct to divide, to align ourselves with power, status, or being “right.” Against that, Paul points us to the cross—a wisdom that looks foolish to the world, yet is the very power of God.

What draws people into this way of life? Not fear. Not force. Love. The late Congressman John Lewis once reflected that what first drew him into the civil rights movement was a love so strong it refused to return hatred for hatred. That kind of love—costly, persistent, embodied—is the “bait,” if you will, of gospel’s fishermen. It is the love we encounter at the table, where Christ’s broken body makes us one body, healing what is divided and sending us back into the world differently.

Epiphany reminds us that Christ’s light reveals not only who God is, but who we are called to be. We are not perfect, powerful, or polished. Yet Jesus believes in us enough to say, “Follow me.” And the way he leads has already been filled with grace.

May we have the courage to follow.

Grace and peace,
Pastor Will