



Sunday January 18, 2026

Second Sunday after Epiphany

So, this weekend we can expect excerpts from the Reverend Martin Luther King's junior most famous speech I have a dream. Yes, you see, we're all familiar with that powerful message. It's going to be heard on television, newspapers, internet articles. There's going to be little memes I've seen, you know, with little snippets that flood people's walls on Facebook and Instagram. Also commemorates the civil rights leader who was assassinated almost 60 years ago. Can you believe how long it's been? 60 years. This I have a dream speech has endured in the American imagination as this perennial call to us, a call to action and hope, especially now in times of great divide in our country. It's a speech that is meant to give us strength in time of grave uncertainty.

It was Dr. King's faithful discipleship as a Christian that made him who he was and made incapable of producing and giving us such an enduring message. His word and action were one, and when discipleship is lived with such integrity and acted on with such commitment, the power of one's word endures and is able to touch and transform other people's lives. Our gospel lesson from John beckons us to consider our call to discipleship. John sees Jesus and declares behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. And John's ability to act again with his integrity and commitment and statement and give such a powerful word is a sign of his own discipleship and encourages his disciples to go and check out Jesus. It's a powerful prophetic word because for Jesus is not declared a king or a warrior, right? He's declared a Lamb, the Lamb of God. A Lamb isn't a mighty figure. In fact, a Lamb was sacrificed in the morning and in the evening in the temple every single day for the people's sins. A Lamb was at the center of the sacrificial Passover meal. So, despite this image, they were drawn to Jesus. What would this mean? I bet they were thinking. And Jesus asked them, "What are you looking for?" Jesus asks them a loaded question. He's asking them, "What do you want out of life? What do they want from him specifically?" And Andrew shares this with his brother, Simon Peter, and he encapsulates everything and says, "We found the Messiah finally." And Peter turns to hear Jesus and Jesus says, "You are Simon



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and you're going to be called Cephas." They ask Jesus where he's staying. He says, "Come and see."

So, we see in this potent message that it is these relationships that are formed and forged together through this power of conversation and these relationships create disciples. Such is the power of God's word to us that when we listen to Jesus in those words, when he says, "What are you looking for?" And that question can be posed here at St. Stephen's as you are engaged in a search for a settled pastor. What are you looking for in this pastor? What are you looking for the future? What kind of goals and visions do you have set for 2026 ahead? This question is a discipleship question and is at the heart a being a disciple. So, as we grapple with these kinds of questions, we are shown a kind of discipleship. It's not just about learning dogma and teachings. It's again all about relationship, relationship with Jesus at the center of our lives. And through this kind of discipleship, we're taught how to care for each other and for others in our neighbors. We're taught to share and sacrifice our resources where they are needed. We are taught to speak out and protect the vulnerable and for who are suffering to be a lamb of God like Jesus. Our discipleship is an ongoing apprenticeship in kingdom building to experience and bring forth to speech and action the kingdom of God that resides deep in our hearts and make it real for all around us. This is what we are looking for, right? And this is what Reverend King knew so well and learned so well in his ministry. The nonviolent action that he took if some of us recall the story of the Montgomery bus boycott back in 1955 and later the freedom marches around the country that grew out of his powerful experience of what God's life and love and word was like within him. As a result, the civil rights movements took on this potent potency that made segregation illegal first in the Civil Rights Act and then the Voting Rights Act of 1964. More than ever in these troubled times we need to look back at that witness, at that nonviolent witness to injustice and embrace it. We are reminded today that the work of repairing and regaining our world is carried out in a discipleship that declares a new heaven and a new earth. Jesus



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was about building and healing relationships and creating a new heaven and a new earth founded in justice and peace.

When Jesus died he did not lead behind writings. Jesus did not leave behind a building, a synagogue. He didn't leave behind any possessions. You know what he left behind? Disciples. Jesus left behind disciples like you and me and these disciples only add to the living word of Jesus and you throw in the mix of the Holy Spirit to guide them and that was enough. Ultimately, discipleship means that our lives deepen and will deepen and are called to deepen to the point where we take a stand. We take a stand for others, even people we don't know, people who are hurting and marginalized and oppressed. And today let us make that commitment to deepen our discipleship by exploring in our hearts. Where are we going? Where is God calling us to be? Reverend King towards the end of his life preached a sermon. This was like a few months before his death and he shared with us one of his most favorite songs that described the vision of his work and I was going to read a few of the lines from this song and some of you might even recognize his song. If I can help somebody as I pass along, if I can cheer somebody with a word or a song, if I can show somebody whose year she is traveling wrong, then my living will not be in vain. If I can do my duty as a Christian ought, if I can bring salvation to a world once wrought, if I can spread the message that the master ought, then my living will not be in vain. What a powerful word, from a powerful disciple.

As we claim now our journey, our place in the journey to build the kingdom of God here on earth, that these words settle in our hearts and move us and bring us closer to Jesus. And together as disciples, let us speak the word that our world so desperately needs to hear about the Lamb of God. And as Dr. King shared, that we too will know if we do these things that our living will not be in vain. Amen.