The Rev. Dr. David K. McIntosh
January 25, 2026- 3rd Sunday after Epiphany-A
Given at Christ Church Quaker Farms, Oxford, CT
Isaiah 9:1-4; Psalm 27; 1 Corinthians 1:10-18; Matthew 4:12-23

'The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light.' ✝

Light… it's made up of many colors. For those of you who are observant, you'll notice we've had a change in color in our sanctuary on by my vestments. We've entered back into the time of the liturgical year known as 'Ordinary Time' (the Sundays after Epiphany and Sundays after Pentecost). During ordinary time, our services tend to be more plain. Gone are the flashy colors of blue and purple, red, gold, and white that represent major Holiday seasons like Christmas and Advent, or Lent and Easter… everything is now *green*.

This season is most defined by what it is *not*— it's not any of those special seasons, its 33 to 34 weeks of 'ordinariness.' During this time, we are no longer called by wonderous events like a star in the sky, angels on high, great pilgrimages to Jerusalem, or cataclysmic events like earthquakes and storms on the sea. We are simply called to live our ordinary lives, to follow Jesus, not because of any wonderous event, but because says to us, as he did to the sons of Zebedee, "follow me."

We are surrounded by *green*— the color of *healing* (it's the color on my doctoral hood and that of all physicians… green is also the symbol of *vitality and hope*. Green ushers in a time when we simply listen for that voice of Jesus, a voice that comes amid the ordinariness of life, telling us of God's presence and God's love for us. A voice that says to each of us, as it did to Simon and Andrew, 'follow me.'

It's *also* a time we must remember St. Paul's urging, 'That there be no divisions among you…' Let me read his words again: 'I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and same purpose.'

Hmmm. How hauntingly appropriate and timely— for our nations and for our churches. There have been many very disturbing episodes of violence throughout our country of late.

As I shared with those of you who ventured out in the snow last week, almost every day I experience a menagerie of emotion: shock, hurt, fear, anger, defiance, and fear again… And I remind myself to hope in our loving God and place myself in those loving hands.

Despite the chaos, and division, I still feel blessed to live in a free nation like ours, where debate can still take place and everyone has a say. And I have come to realize over the years of my priesthood, having served in and supplied in so many different parishes in our Diocese (many without clergy who rely solely on their lay leadership), how blessed I am to be part of the Episcopal Church and specifically this parish in Quaker Farms. Your faith and work are inspiring. You are blessed with a generous Vestry and membership, and I look forward to hearing the reports of the many committees at our Annual Meeting today.

Still, I'm conscious of the many divisions that exist not only among the people of this nation, but within our small communities, and indeed within our many parishes. I find encouragement

in St. Paul's words, which highlight the responsibility we all have as Christians, to be united toward the same purpose, no matter our differences. As human beings, we take pride in belonging, in being part of a group, whether a national political organization, a local town or civic group, or this church. Whether we work on organizing community events that matter to us, serve on the Vestry, sing in the choir, or strive on committees to make various sales and community events a success, we often identify ourselves with the ideals promoted by those groups. And so often, we find ourselves in conflict with others, even members of that same group. Divisions within a community—be it a nation, a political party, a religious community, or a family— can easily erode into animosities. Strongly held views (right or wrong) can lead people to reject those who have differing views. They can lead to a break down in fellowship with others and toward the condemnation and even demonization of another. We are witnesses to this today.

So, Paul's words are very appropriate now; for they help us remember to deal with those who differ from us in a spirit of compassion. St. Paul's main point is that the saving grace of God does not come from any human leader or group; it comes from the sacrificial love of God. It's wrong to identify the Christian faith with one particular belief, understanding, or practice, and it's wrong to identify our Church with one particular group or person.
We, who call ourselves Christian, are called to move away from the juvenile tendencies so prevalent in our society now, those adolescent desires to be right, to win, to be in control. For these are simple human pursuits, not God's.
Of course, we should express our beliefs and values, *and* we must also listen when others do the same. It's not about self-denial or submission, but about fellowship and compassion.
The grace and power of God does not come through particular leaders or groups, whether in larger society or in this parish Church. God's ways are not human ways.
God's way is the way of the Cross—a confusing, overwhelming, incomprehensible expression of the power of love— it's the way of unselfish, sacrificial love. And Jesus said, "Follow me."

As we come to the altar this morning and as we prepare to participate in our Annual Parish Meeting on next Sunday, may all strive *to follow him*. It's always about Jesus Christ. Follow the God's ways… follow Jesus.
'I appeal to you… In the name of Lord Jesus Christ… that there be no divisions among you… that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose'… the love of God, in our Lord Jesus Christ. ✝