

BEING REVEALED

Order of Service (bulletin)

<https://www.spiritofhope.ca/news-and-events>

Video (recorded live stream)

<https://www.youtube.com/@spiritofhopeunitedchurch791>

January 18, 2026

Epiphany 2

1st Corinthians 1:3-9

Grace and peace from our Loving God and our Savior Jesus Christ. I continually thank my God for you because of the gift bestowed on you and Christ Jesus, in whom you have been richly endowed with every gift of speech knowledge. In the same way, the testimony about Christ has been so confirmed among you, that you lack no spiritual gift, as you wait for the revelation of our Saviour Jesus Christ. God will strengthen you to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Saviour Jesus Christ. God, through whom you have been called into intimacy with Jesus our Savior, is faithful.

John 1:35-42

The next day, John was by the Jordan again with two of his disciples. Seeing Jesus walk by, John said, "Look! There's the Lamb of God!" The two disciples heard what John had said and followed Jesus. When Jesus turned around and noticed them following, he asked them, "What are you looking for?" They replied, "Rabbi," - which means "Teacher"- "where are you staying?" "Come and see," Jesus answered. So, they went to see where he was staying, and they spent the rest of the day with him. It was about four in the afternoon. One of the two had followed Jesus after hearing John was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. The first thing Andrew did was to find Simon Peter and say, "We've found the Messiah!" -which means "the Anointed one." Andrew brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon ben-Jonah; I will call you 'Rock'" that is "Peter."



I've been able to see and and hear some famous people. I got to see Hugh Jackman. My son got to give Hugh Jackman a fist bump. This was when we were in New York and he was coming out of the Winter Garden Theater having just performed in The Music Man. We didn't go to see that play, but we hung out outside the stage door. And Matt got to give a fist bump with Wolverine. And we also before Hugh Jackman came out, we saw John Lithgow go in backstage. I was like, "Oo, that's Lord Farquard." I also got to see Ringo Star. I saw Ringo Star on his first All-Starr Band tour. Now, I've seen a few concerts and stuff, but you know, there's something unique about being able to say, "I've seen a Beatle." I've seen a fair number of politicians in person. I've even had some conversations with a few. Locally I have been in the same room as Danielle Smith and Naheed Nenshi, not at the same time necessarily. And I was actually able to have conversations with both of them; only one of them cut my mic off. I got to see Mark Carney as he was recently PM but he wasn't an MP yet. When I think of US politicians I got to see Ronald Reagan drive by as he was coming to give some speech in Penticton when I was there as a student minister. I heard Al Gore speak. I heard Barack Obama speak. Both

Rev. T. Blaine Gregg

of whom have legitimate Nobel Peace Prizes.

As we hear that reading from the Gospel of John. And again, I think I made the point last week that John the Gospel is named after John, one of Jesus' disciples, who is a completely different John than the John who was John the Baptist. And I can't remember if I made the point last week or not, but I mean, you know, we've got so many Johns and so many Marys, they could have mixed it up a bit.

This is not the first time that John the Baptist publicly proclaimed that Jesus was the lamb of God. If you were paying really close attention to the shortened version of the reading, it uses the word again in the first verse we heard. John was again by the Jordan and saw Jesus and said, "This is the lamb of God." It happens a few verses earlier as well. And in that section that's before in the first time is where John says something like I was inspired to know that when I see the spirit descend on someone that's the lamb of God and tells that story of seeing Jesus being endowed with the spirit. It's quite possible that the two of John's disciples who are mentioned in our reading had heard John talk about Jesus before. And so when John says, "Look, there it is. That's the lamb of God." They probably remembered a previous sermon where John had said something like, "I baptize people with water, but this one who is coming is going to baptize with the Holy Spirit, and I know who that is because I saw the spirit of God descend on them like a dove." I have to assume that these two disciples had that information shared with them before John says, "Oh, look, there's the lamb of God I was talking about." John's previous sermons must have been very inspiring because it says that these two followers of John started following Jesus at least for that day. And it sounds like they literally followed Jesus. They were just kind of walking behind him, you know. And Jesus kind of turns around and goes, "What are you looking for?" And they don't say what they're looking for. They say, "Have you got time to really chat with us? Where are you staying?" And the story says they spent the whole day with Jesus. It was Jesus who broke the ice. *What are you looking for?* And it was the start of a much longer process of learning and growth. And so meaningful was that time that these two disciples started following Jesus on a day-by-day basis. And in fact, they started telling other people about Jesus. So they took John's experience, made it their own and started telling other people about their experiences. You tell two friends and I'll tell two friends and so on and so on.

Now the part we're at the point in the story where the author is named dropping famous disciples of Jesus that would have been well known to the late first century audience reading the gospel. That's where we hear that one of those John disciples who followed Jesus was Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter. *Now you know the rest of the story.* And now even though the author had already called Andrew's brother Simon Peter, because everybody reading the gospel knows that that's what this disciple was known as, Simon Peter. We have the author take a step back and say, "Oh, by the way, here's how we got that name." Shimon, son of Johannan, I will call you Cephas, which means rock. And because the gospel is being written in Greek, rock is Petra in Greek, which is a female noun. To make it male, you make it Petros. I will call you Petros, Peter, rock. I imagine Jesus said those words to Simon in Aramaic. But as the story is shared for a new audience that speaks Greek, the language becomes meaningful for the people who understand Greek and we get Petros: Peter.

Now speaking of the Greek, it's also the language of first Corinthians and in fact it's the language that the entire New Testament had been written in. What we heard today from first Corinthians was the start of Paul's letter to that early church in Corinth, Greece. It was one of a number of letters that Paul wrote to the Corinthians. In fact, it's not Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, even though we call it first Corinthians.

It's cordial the way it starts off: kind words of greeting. Grace and peace to you. You are doing great. You're so knowledgeable. You are so gifted. He's buttering them up. Because First Corinthians is not the only letter that

Rev. T. Blaine Gregg

Paul wrote to that church. It's not the first one. There's a reference in chapter five where Paul even says in my previous letter I talked about this and that. It's part of a back and forth conversation between the apostle and the Corinthian Christians and Paul also had at least two in-person visits according to the book of Acts to this church. Clearly, Paul, even though they've been conversing for a bit, has new lessons, new information to share with the Corinthians. This letter is full of answers to specific questions. When you read through the book of First Corinthians, you might notice sections that start off with words like, "Now, concerning this topic, here's what I have to say about it." It's like they gave him a list of, "Can you tell us a little bit more about this? Now concerning marriage, blah blah blah. Now concerning this issue, blah blah blah. And as we're going to hear next week, there was significant conflict and disagreement amongst the Corinthians concerning what leadership should look like and what direction the church should be going.

The final verse of our Corinthians reading today that we read from the Inclusive Bible paraphrase of the New Testament. *You have been called into intimacy with Jesus our savior.* The Greek word behind intimacy there is *koinōnion*. I'm not a Greek person at all. It's often translated as *fellowship* in many English translations. You have been called into fellowship with Jesus our savior. The New Revised Standard Version, which I find to be one of the best sort of good translations, not so much a paraphrase, but a good translation of the Bible, uses the phrase into the *partnership* of Jesus Christ our Lord. Partnership, fellowship, and intimacy create different pictures, don't they? If we say I'm in partnership with you, that creates a certain kind of image of our relationship. If I say I'm intimate with you, that might create a different one. If I say I am in fellowship with you, that might create a different one. So, we've got all of that wrapped up in one word and here we are in English trying to figure out what degree this should be compared to. That word can also mean things as stale as contribution or being together, communion, or can mean we participate together. Actually, in the modern Greek, when I plugged it into Google Translate, it said that the modern translation of that word is *society*. That's a long way from intimacy. You have been called into society with Jesus Christ. Clearly, Paul is leaning toward the more intimate side of that definition spectrum. It's more than just associating with or being alongside. It's a deep connection, a close sharing. You have been called into a deeply close relationship with Jesus. And the preposition is also ambiguous. It's perfectly legitimate and is often at the same time fair to say you have been called into a deeply close relationship of Jesus. It's not just a divine connection to God because of Jesus through Jesus but a human connection with each other because of Jesus. Clearly, that's how Paul is using it here, given the wider context of the letter. Being called into deep close relationship means something when it comes to how we're supposed to live and act and be as a church. And Paul hints at that right at the beginning, even if he is kind of just buttering them up with some compliments before he gets into the criticisms.

Both of our scripture passages today recognize a reality that meaningful connections can grow and deepen over time. We don't always start at our peak. Andrew and his unnamed friend move from John the Baptist sermon to direct conversations with Jesus. We don't know what followup the other disciple did, whether they became a close follower of Jesus or whether they went back with John but at least in the case of Andrew, it involves choosing to become part of Jesus' circle and then even recruiting his brother to the cause. Paul is clear that the Corinthians are not at the end yet, but they are being strengthened along the way. They're not where they were when they started and they're not where they probably will end up. They're finding strength and courage along the way. Increasingly equipped, learning. And equipped here means more than knowledge. It's more than faith. It's more than even a spiritual connection with God and Jesus. But it also means equipped in a closer relationship with each other as the church, learning and changing and growing together.

You know, the kids today like to use that abbreviation TMI. I don't know. Do kids still say that? *Too much information*. Something we might comment on when maybe this implied line of intimacy has been breached. And yes, there is a time and a place to keep things less deep. Example: like in passing... *Oh, so how are you?*

Rev. T. Blaine Gregg

I was having this conversation after church last week. Sometimes we struggle with how to honestly answer that question. We have to quickly gauge, first of all, do I have time to get into it? And secondly, does this person really want to know the depth of the potential answer to that question? Or is it just the opening like Paul saying, "Grace and peace, you're doing great."

Something I take from our readings today is that communities are drawn together as they share their faith and that they can be places where safety and welcome and vulnerability becomes increasingly possible over time. Jesus once talked about the church being when two or three are gathered together. Now my experience in over almost 36 years of active congregational ministry is that when two or three are gathered together there will be at least five opinions. I recognize that each of us is going to be at a different place on whatever journey we might be connecting with at the same time. Even if we're on a shared journey together, we are not going to be the same as everyone else along that way. We're not going to be the same when it comes to our need and our willingness to be fully vulnerable, our need to share more intimately the truth about who we are, and our ability to hear someone else's vulnerable truth. I may not be able and willing to have all of my walls down in front of everyone all the time. And if I did, you would go, too much information. But I wonder sometimes, can the church be a place where relationships can grow intimate enough that I can find a sympathetic and an empathetic ear from time to time? Are we more than just how you do and I'm okay?

As your minister, as a minister, I want you to know that I am open to your willingness to be open with someone. Now, we might need to set up a time and a place for the chat. It might be like the disciples following Jesus going, "Where are you standing? This is going to be more than we can cover on the road." But I want to be at least one person who will allow you to be as vulnerable as you're willing to be. I probably won't have answers. I definitely won't have judgment. But sharing in and of itself can be enlightening.

My encouragement for each of us is to find ways within ourselves to increase connections beyond our existing level of closeness. To see closeness as something that can learn and change and grow. And this will allow us and it allows others to continue to be the church to grow in our own faith and our ongoing relationship with this world that God loves and whatever mission we happen to be sharing together at this time. Andrew listened intimately to John and then to Jesus. And then Simon listened intimately to Andrew. New doors opened for them as they found permission to grow in connection. Now minimally as a church, let us be open to learning and changing and growing together.

Let's pray.

Thank you God for companions on this journey of faith. Amen

#595VU We Are Pilgrims

Rev. T. Blaine Gregg