



## BIBLE STUDIES THAT WORK

### Epiphany 3 (A)

January 25, 2026

**RCL:** Isaiah 9:1-4; Psalm 27:1, 5-13; **I Corinthians 1:10-18;** Matthew 4:12-23

### Opening Prayer |

Give us grace, O Lord, to answer readily the call of our Savior Jesus Christ and proclaim to all people the Good News of his salvation, that we and the whole world may perceive the glory of his marvelous works; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.

### Context |

Paul loved this group of people in Corinth. As the church's founder, Paul had a soft spot for its members and maintained a loving commitment to the goings-on of the community. When the disciple Chloe reported to Paul that there was division, Paul sent an immediate reply in the form of the correspondence we call "the First Book of Corinthians."

The city of Corinth had a standard commitment to the Imperial Cult and the unique social dynamics of first-century Rome. One of the important components of public life was the relationship between a patron and client. This patronage model featured a wealthy and powerful "patron" essentially buying loyalty, favors, and political support from those who were not as high up on the social ladder, making them their "client."

When Paul confronted the division caused by the Corinthian church's members having differing views on leadership, he confronted more than just opinions about spirituality and theology. He was warning against the imperial cult's structures infiltrating the church, the place where all are one in Christ. Paul's apparent hazy memory of who he baptized drives the point home. We follow the footsteps of Jesus, alone, no matter how holy or well-renowned another teacher or saint may be. There is one God who revealed their Divine self in one man: Jesus Christ.

This elitist model that Paul challenged within the Corinthian church should have felt out of place to its members. Paul clues us in just a few verses later in 1:26, "Consider your own call, brothers and sisters: not many of you were wise by human standards, not many were

powerful, not many were of noble birth.” The hierarchy that existed outside the wood and stone of this house-church, the one that excluded the majority of its members, was not to be repeated under that roof.

His argument in this passage is twofold. Using the rhetorical tool known as “covert allusion,” Paul sarcastically poked fun at the idea that his teaching did not compare to the teaching of the philosophers and other traveling preachers whom the Corinthians would have known. The Apostle to the Gentiles tended to be a bit blunt, especially with the people he felt closest to. This bluntness and lack of eloquent language may have troubled some members who were more focused on “the way the world did things.” By pointing out their own lack of wealth and nobility, Paul leveled the field and reminded them of the truth they were called to—a truth incredibly simple, but impossibly hard.

## Theological Reflection |

The season of Epiphany reminds us that God sent out God’s light into the entire world—not just to a specific location or people, but to everyone. Paul’s urgent call for unity does not erase the need for differing opinions or varieties of beliefs. Paul was a Jew, and Jews had the practice of taking a piece of Scripture and turning it over and over, looking at it in different ways, chewing on it, arguing about its meaning and implications, and *still* being committed to one another.

Looking at the relationships across (and even within) denominations around the world, or even in the United States today, it doesn’t take long to see the challenges we face as we attempt to move into the future as one body. We may not be judging by the same measures the Corinthians were judging, but our divisions remain heartbreaking to the Jesus who prayed for our unity. We are as beset by disagreements and difficulties as the people of Corinth.

When we try to determine who is in and who is out—who is conservative enough or liberal enough, who balances piety correctly, who *counts* as a follower of Jesus—we lose our footing. We are not called to judge one another, but to stand together and help one another down the path. We’re all bound to stumble, to get things wrong, but it’s the unity, the knowing we are still of one family, that compels us to continue on together, even in the midst of our mistakes.

The Episcopal Church relies on the ancient Creeds to lay out the orthodox faith. Once we move beyond that and start side-eyeing one another based on things that, frankly, don’t matter much in the end, we lose sight of the One who called us. Christ stands at the center of a *very* wide tent. Our goal is to not to push people out who are near the edge, but to do our part in gathering *all* closer to that center beam.

A quote relied on by Anglicans for centuries is helpful here: "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity." Not one of us possesses all the answers. Give one another freedom of Christian expression and continue walking with love until we all make it home.

## Reflection Questions |

- When have you experienced divisions in the Church? How did you navigate the situation(s)? Did you learn anything on the other side?
- Do you remember a time before you were "brought in" to Christianity? Does the idea that redemption is found nailed to a tree seem as far-fetched (or foolish) today as it did then? What changed?
- Consider the past priests and ministry leaders you've held great fondness. Have there been teachings you held that didn't align with the leaders who brought you into the faith? How did you navigate that discrepancy?
- How has your faith grown and changed over your years of following Jesus? How do you lean into the potential for growth for those with whom you disagree?

## Faith in Practice |

Some of us have experienced trauma by different members of Christ's body, the church. This can make it difficult to see some people in our faith as beloved siblings, but above everything that distinguishes Christians as Christians, Jesus prayed that love would be at the top of the list. Over the next week, commit to praying daily for the unity of the Church. Our spiritual ancestors have left us beautiful language to use in The Book of Common Prayer on page 818...

"O God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, our only Savior, the Prince of Peace: Give us grace seriously to lay to heart the great dangers we are in by our unhappy divisions; take away all hatred and prejudice, and whatever else may hinder us from godly union and concord; that, as there is but one Body and one Spirit, one hope of our calling, one Lord, one Faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of us all, so we may be all of one heart and of one soul, united in one holy bond of truth and peace, of faith and charity, and may with one mind and one mouth glorify *thee*; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*"

**Sami Heney** | *Faced with a deep thirst for the Bible from a young age, Sami's wisdom and experience have been acquired from across denominational boundaries. Born a Southern Baptist, shaped by formative years in Messianic Judaism and later non-denominational life, she ultimately found The Episcopal Church balanced a blend of scripture, tradition, reason, and logic she'd been seeking. Her first Sunday attending St.*

*Timothy's on Cincinnati's eastside, a lesbian couple's child was baptized. As a gay person, witnessing the inclusion and celebration of the LGBTQ+ community in the church was a turning point. Her eventual work as Communication Director for the parish has formed her consideration for language and proclamation, as well as deepened her love for the Daily Office. Sami is currently completing a Master of Divinity at Bexley-Seabury Episcopal Seminary. When not at church or studying, she enjoys biking, sketching buildings, and spending time with her partner and friends.*



Sermons that Work and Bible Studies that Work are a joint offering of Forward Movement and The Office of Communication at The Episcopal Church.

<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/bible-study/>

<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/sermons-that-work>