

Less a sermon, more a travelogue  
Sermon preached at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church  
January 24, 2026 (5pm Chapel Service)  
The Rev. Dr. Nina R. Pooley

Apologies up front, this feels less like a sermon, and more like a travelogue, mixed with a glimpse of my calendar. In my defense, Matthew started it! Our Gospel texts begins with the words, "When Jesus heard that John had been arrested." John the Baptist is arrested for stirring up the people, for resisting religious authorities, and the political regime. For preparing the way of the Lord.

Matthew tells us, that when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdraws to Galilee, which fulfills Isaiah's prophesy:

"Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali,  
on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—  
the people who sat in darkness  
have seen a great light,  
and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death  
light has dawned."

From that time, after he heard that John had been arrested, Jesus began to proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." And he goes for a walk around the area, which for him is the sea of Galilee. And it's from here that he calls his disciples, saying "Follow me ... and I will make you fishers of people." Then together they walk throughout Galilee. Jesus teaches in the synagogues, and proclaims the good news of the kingdom, and cures every disease and every sickness among the people.

Friends, the Gospel is not subtle this week - opening with the moments following John's arrest. We can picture it clearly - given the images and videos of brutal arrests and detainments happening in Minneapolis, and Portland Maine, and other places in our nation. Jesus responds to John's arrest by going to Galilee and walking around. Walking the neighborhoods, walking by the places people are working and making their living. Being in their midst and responding to their needs. I see images of the witnesses walking the neighborhoods in Minneapolis and Portland - trying to provide basic needs for their neighbors: food, medicine, and protection.

The Gospel call before us this week is unmistakable, we are called to have our eyes wide open, to walk around, to notice what is happening, and to respond. The Gospel asks, how will we fish for people? How will we proclaim that the kingdom of heaven has come near? How will we embody the good news, so that people who live in darkness can see some light?

As we said last week, we aren't called to respond in the same way, but we are all called to respond to what is happening - locally and beyond. Because **not** responding when others are suffering oppression and violence makes us complicit.

We are called to pay attention and do what we can. Here's what I've noticed in my "walking around" this week:

On Monday I attended the MLK event at Price Memorial AME Zion church. I met a toddler with his foster parents, who are in the process of adopting him, even though they are closing in on retirement, and their next youngest child is 25.

After the program, I walked over to the BMC Bloodmobile to donate blood as my act of service. There I met a young woman celebrating her 18th birthday that day. She decided to donate for the first time as her way of celebrating. Even though the site of blood makes her faint.

**Friends, may the people who live in darkness see some light.**

On Tuesday we received a letter from the chief attorney of Berkshire Legal Aid, thanking us for joining with other churches in financially assisting a single mother and her children who were about to be evicted Christmas week. The attorney wrote to tell us that the support was life-changing for this family, and the people of legal aid were overwhelmed by our willingness to help. She continued, "When neighbors come together to help each other out in times of need, we foster a stronger and healthier community for all. Thank you for showing the way with your leadership. We are grateful."<sup>1</sup>

**Friends, may the people who live in darkness see some light.**

On Wednesday afternoon, anticipating the freezing weather, I went to Walmart and filled the basket in my shopping cart with men's and women's gloves. A man nearby bedecked in camo asked me about them. "That's a lot of gloves." I explained about St. Stephen's Table and worrying about Friday's weather. He offered to help pay for the gloves.

And Anne Williams sent me a link to a "Melt the ICE hat" knitting project. The project was launched by a group of knitters in Minnesota, who designed a pattern for a red hat. They follow in the footsteps of Norwegian knitters, who knit red hats as visible signs of protest against Nazi occupation. Our St. Stephen's knitters are poised to begin our own protest knitting, you're welcome to join us!

**Friends, may the people who live in darkness see some light.**

Thursday was a busy day. There was the family grateful for the cord of wood we were able to purchase and have delivered to them before the arctic cold descended.

And the St Stephen's Table client, who explained that she is descended from slaves, and then described to me how heartbreaking things are in Minneapolis, where, as she noted, George Floyd was killed.

That same day in Minneapolis clergy from across the country gathered to help, to bear witness and to pray. At the faith-led press conference, the Rev. DeWayne Davis proclaimed that the federal government had “made a mistake” by targeting Minneapolis. Given the city’s experience with organizing in the wake of George Floyd’s murder - Davis explained the federal government should have expected the intense grassroots resistance that has emerged in the city — including from local faith leaders. He said, “You messed up. You didn’t understand what we went through. We didn’t do all that because we are heroes and saviors. We did it because we understand the meaning of our faith: that we are all connected. We join together. We are a part of a people, a body of humanity that is made in the image of a loving and beautiful God [who] wants all God’s children [to be] free.”<sup>2</sup>

**Friends, may the people who live in darkness see some light.**

Lastly, on Friday: I’m on Facebook, reading posts from clergy friends in Maine. Who are facing ICE agents and chaos, and trying to protect and support communities living through the unthinkable, on streets that I know, in places I love.

It can feel helpless. What can we do from here? We pray, honor their witness, and reassure them and those they protect that they aren’t alone. And we learn what they have to teach us. As we prepare ourselves for when it will happen here, to us and our neighbors.

**Oh, Beloved Ones, may the people who live in darkness see some light. Amen.**

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<sup>1</sup> Email received on Jan 20, 2026, sent by Carrie A. Love, Managing Attorney, Berkshire County Community Legal Aid

<sup>2</sup> Jack Jenkins, Religion News Service, "Hundreds of clergy descend on Minneapolis and go on lookout for ICE," Jan 22, 2026, [religionnews.com](http://religionnews.com)