

Sermon for 25 January 2026@ Bethesda UMC/Baltimore, Maryland 21214

Third Sunday after the Epiphany

Scriptures: Isaiah 9:1-4; Psalm 27:1, 4-9 (*Insert:Alternate leader,people*);1 Corinthians 1:10-18; 4:12-23

Sermon:

A friend in Bible class asked me whether I believed the Bible figuratively or literally. Those are kind of catch words, but I said, figuratively. By that I meant there's way too much between the people who wrote the words, and all the time and translation, and the original meaning of expressions and what we mean now, to stimulate my psyche and come at me in my moments of reading and reflection on them, to stop with the first meaning that comes into my head.

That being said, what can we do with this week's events? Pay attention to the time: This is the season of Epiphany, wow-time, world-changing- news time, starting with the star and the Wise Men, and now Jesus-grown-up time.... so serious people have selected these texts to use when we meet this third Sunday after the Epiphany, the world-changing time, and let them sink in as we pray and share.

First comes more Isaiah: This time we've got people with so much pain, beat down, just seeing light through a crack, able to think about what it's been like ... and to swim in hope and believe that's what God did, or will do.

That's part of every day with Jesus. New depth to things. Having the rug pulled out from under it all, again and again. Until it is, you're just half living. Until you walk with Jesus.

Then you've got one of the Psalms that just can't sit down...." My soul is so happpppyyyy" ... you know the song That's part of Jesus- living, too... Never forget how that came alive to slaves in our church, just like slaves in Egypt long before ... We think the American Revolution is a big part of our history. The French thought so, and gave us the Statue of Liberty to remind us. The Japanese did, and gave us the cherry blossoms ... Honoring that is basic to being American. So is slavery We held onto it so long and those folks taught us something about Jesus we'd never know... Some of our hymns from then are DEEP...

Then again, here's Paul trying to get the young church, probably no more people than we've got here ... saying,"Can't you all get along?" Like you and me ... the argument we had last week; the way we just can't celebrate. PLEASE. It's all foolishness unless it's kind... every day ... and yes, that happened last week, in our family ... work on us, Lord Jesus... Life is basic, knowing and still giving...God-like . Foolishness unless it's like that kind of knowing and forgiving and starting over on both sides...

Then close with Jesus, changing location when it gets too up=townish, too close to Roman power and Jewish temple arguments....and you can see just a hint of the solid work he gets down for a couple of years, convincing, teaching, healing ...and we close, leveling off for maybe two years so his career was unforgettable when it stopped, which we,ll deal with soon enough, literal darkness and dread after salvation and lightwhen Lent shows up on us ... and we see still another side about everything.

Let us pray: Lord, this week is noisier than the last, and where it's going is everyone's guess. Crooked words and ugly use of power. Let us, listen to us, call out a little more here than we're used to. We're seeing a mockery of good government, every day. If that means we're not treating our love faithfully, forgive us. If we're just breathing fire with the power we have, reshape us.

We're just waking up ... We're opening our eyes to the to the possibilities ... Don't let us forget that. This is carpenter-time with you ... We're building something new. Bring us close to thee.

Amen.

Metta meditation, or loving-kindness meditation, is a Buddhist practice for cultivating compassion for ourselves and others through directing loving, friendly phrases and goodwill. The word “metta” is a Pali word, most often translated as loving-kindness, but has also been translated as universal goodwill or loving-friendliness. The practice originates from the historical Buddha’s early discourse on immeasurable friendliness, the *Metta Sutta*.

Metta is a concentration and mindfulness practice that invites the practitioner into a more loving, connected state of mind. This loving-kindness practice can be practiced anywhere, anytime, be it on a meditation cushion, driving in traffic, or walking down a busy street.

“In metta, we work to develop feelings of ease and love as boundless as the oceans that nourish and sustain our world,” Buddhist teacher Josh Korda. It’s a big challenge with a bigger reward. The results of metta can change how we see ourselves, in turn changing how we see the world.

Benefits of Compassion Practice

- Improved social and familial relationships
- Increased self-love, self-compassion, and self-worth
- Transformation of emotional pain
- Enhanced sense of connection and belonging to the world
- Better mental and emotional health
- Decreased stress and anxiety

Here’s how to practice metta meditation. To begin, find a quiet, uplifting place where you can do your loving-kindness practice, setting aside 15-20 minutes to complete the meditation. You can do this practice with your eyes open or closed.

1) Sit comfortably, in a chair or on a meditation cushion. Allow your body to feel at ease and supported by the surface beneath you. Begin to connect to your breath, focusing on the inhale and exhale until your breath finds a natural flow.

2) Bring your attention to your heart area. You may wish to bring a hand to your heart, or leave them comfortably rested on your knees. Begin to offer loving-kindness to yourself by repeating these phrases, allowing ample space between each one:

May I be safe
May I be healthy
May I be happy
May I be at ease
May I be filled with loving-kindness
May I be peaceful

3) Next, think of someone you love and care about. This can be a family member, friend, a pet, or someone helpful in your life. Picture them in your mind, and offer them the same phrases of loving-kindness:

May I be safe
May you be healthy
May you be happy
May you be at ease
May you be filled with loving-kindness
May you be peaceful

4) If you find your mind wandering, return to the rhythm of your breath. Next, call to mind a person you consider difficult. This could be someone you've had a disagreement with, or any sort of difficulty with. If this feels too painful at first, send yourself the loving-kindness you need. Imagine this person in your mind, and allow your heart to soften toward them by repeating the phrases again:

May all beings be safe
May they be healthy
May they be happy
May they be at ease
May they be filled with loving-kindness
May all beings be peaceful