

**St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth
Sunday, December 28th, 2025
Rev. Gerry Gallant**

**Whom Do You Seek?
First Sunday After Christmas
John 18:1-18**

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship

Great and marvelous are your deeds,
Lord God Almighty.

**Just and true are your ways,
King of the nations.**

Who will not fear you, Lord,
and bring glory to your name?

**For you alone are holy.
All nations will come and worship before you.**

Prayer of Adoration and Invocation

Almighty and ever present God,
you uphold heaven and earth and all creatures.
All things come from your generous hand:
You send the nourishing rain, the refreshing wind,
the warming sun, the blustering snow.
You make buds appear, flowers bloom,
fruit grow, and harvests mature.
Through each day of our lives,
whether in sickness or health,
prosperity or poverty, joy, or sorrow,
you are in control.
Help us to be patient when things go against us,
thankful when things go well,
and always confident that nothing

could ever separate us from your love.
For your unending faithfulness, we thank and praise you.
To you be glory, now and forever. **Amen.**

Call to Confession

Prepare the way of the Lord!
Let us make our confession to God.

Prayer of Confession

**As we draw to the close of this year
and claim the year ahead, our Father,
we need to confess to you those pieces of the past
that persist in pulling us backward.
Through admitting our failures and sharing our sin,
we would like to put away those things
that nibble and nag, de-energize and depress.
With boldness,
we admit to squandering time and talent,
good intentions and better ideas,
opportunities for growth and occasions for grace.
We admit that we have most often taken care of ourselves
while others have stood in line.
We have defined our interests carefully and our goals precisely,
using energy and expertise gainfully
to the detriment of family, friends, community, and church.
We agonize with memories that sit heavily
and images that cause us to blush
and ask that you would grant us your forgiveness
as we confess our individual regrets and remorse in silence. . .**

We pray this in the might name of Jesus Christ, our Lord, Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

The mercy of our God is from everlasting to everlasting.
Hear and believe the good news of the Gospel.
In Jesus Christ, God's generous love reaches out to embrace us.
We are forgiven and set free to begin again.
Let us forgive one another just as God has forgiven us.
May the peace of Christ be with us all.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
 Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
 Give us this day our daily bread.
 And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.
 And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the Evil One.
 For Thine is the Kingdom, the power, and the glory,
 Forever and ever. Amen.

Hymn #136: "The First Nowell"

The first nowell the angel did say
 was to certain poor shepherds in fields as they lay,
 in fields where they lay keeping their sheep,
 on a cold winter's night that was so deep.

Refrain:

Nowell, nowell, nowell, nowell!
 Born is the King of Israel.

This star drew nigh to the northwest;
 o'er Bethlehem it took its rest;
 and there it did both stop and stay
 right over the place where Jesus lay. (Refrain)

Then entered in those wise men three
 full reverently upon their knee,
 and offered there in his presence
 their gold and myrrh and frankincense. (Refrain)

Responsive Reading**Isaiah 61:10 - 62:3**

¹⁰ I will greatly rejoice in the LORD;
 my soul shall exult in my God,
 for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation;
 he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
 as a bridegroom decks himself like a priest with a beautiful headdress,
 and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

¹¹ **For as the earth brings forth its sprouts,
 and as a garden causes what is sown in it to sprout up,
 so the Lord God will cause righteousness and praise**

to sprout up before all the nations.

Zion's Coming Salvation

62 For Zion's sake I will not keep silent,
and for Jerusalem's sake I will not be quiet,
until her righteousness goes forth as brightness,
and her salvation as a burning torch.

²The nations shall see your righteousness,
and all the kings your glory,
and you shall be called by a new name
that the mouth of the LORD will give.

³You shall be a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD,
and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Anthem (Music Ministry): "Let Every Nation"

Prayer for illumination
(Congregant Prepared)

Scripture

John 18:1-18

18 When Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. ² Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with his disciples. ³ So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons. ⁴ Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" ⁵ They answered him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. ⁶ When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground. ⁷ So he asked them again, "Whom do you seek?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." ⁸ Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go." ⁹ This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken: "Of those whom you gave me I have lost not one." ¹⁰ Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) ¹¹ So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?"

Jesus Faces Annas and Caiaphas

¹² So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him. ¹³ First they led him to Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. ¹⁴ It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people.

Peter Denies Jesus

¹⁵ Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, ¹⁶ but Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at the door, and brought Peter in. ¹⁷ The servant girl at the door said to Peter, “You also are not one of this man’s disciples, are you?” He said, “I am not.” ¹⁸ Now the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves. Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself.

Sermon

We return to our study of the book of John and pick up in Chapter 18 which begins a new section of John’s Gospel. If you can recall chapters 13-17 all took place in the upper room as the disciples celebrated Passover with Jesus. One night. One place. One extended conversation filled with promises, warnings, comfort, instruction, and prayer. Jesus has washed feet, predicted betrayal, promised the coming of the Spirit, prayed for His disciples, and committed them into the Father’s care.

But now that time has come to a close, and they leave the upper room and begin their journey to the garden. The moment that they leave the warm light of the room and set foot into the darkness, God’s plan is set into motion. The arrest, the trial, the humiliation, the mocking, the cross, the burial and the resurrection, it all begins right here in this moment.

John tells us, beginning in verse one,

John 18:1-3

18 When Jesus had spoken these words, he went out with his disciples across the brook Kidron, where there was a garden, which he and his disciples entered. ² Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, for Jesus often met there with his disciples. ³ So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons.

What sets the book of John apart from the other Gospels is his focus on Jesus Christ as the Son of God. While each of the synoptic gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, wrap up the upper room discourse in 25 verses or less by being focused on what happened, the washing of feet and the celebration of the first communion, John wrote five chapters on what occurred in the upper room, 155 verses, focused on what Jesus, said, taught and prayed for in the room.

The same occurs here now with the Garden which goes unnamed, John does not mention the agonized prayer that we know so well from the synoptic Gospels. Jesus asking the Father if

there was any way for the cup to pass, yet at the same time surrendering himself fully over to the will of the Father. John skips all of it and moves directly to the arrest of Jesus Christ.

The verb John uses for ‘went out’ is deliberate. He is not describing something casual. It is moving with a sense of purpose. Jesus does not wander out of the upper room; He exits it intentionally.

He crosses the Kidron Valley—a place that is associated in Israel’s history with mourning, judgment, and exile—and enters a garden. John never names the garden. Matthew and Mark will tell us it is Gethsemane. Luke will describe the anguish of Jesus in prayer. But John skips over all those details, not because they are unimportant, but because they are not his focus. John wants us to see the authority of Jesus. He wants us to understand who Jesus is, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, the Son of the One True Living God.

Then John paints the scene: **‘So Judas, having procured a band of soldiers and some officers from the chief priests and the Pharisees, went there with lanterns and torches and weapons.’**

The word translated “band” is the Greek word *‘speira’*. In its literal sense, a *speira* could refer to a Roman cohort—hundreds of Roman soldiers. John may be using the term somewhat flexibly, but the point he is trying to make is unmistakable: this is not just a few men, it is a significant armed force. Alongside the Romans are officers from the temple—Jewish religious authorities. Roman power and religious power stand together against Jesus. Political authority and religious authority unite in opposition to the Son of God.

Judas it seems was expecting Jesus to resist arrest. Maybe Judas assumed that he might be in danger. But that assumption exposes just how little Judas truly understands the One he betrays.

If Jesus wanted to resist arrest, no *speira* would be enough. If Jesus wanted to fight, heaven itself would intervene. As Jesus said in the book of Matthew:

Matthew 26:53

Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels?

It is clear that Judas has misjudged both the power of Christ and the purpose of Christ.

What unfolds next echoes all the way back to Genesis. A sinless man stands in a garden, facing the representative of Satan. The first time that happened, the human race fell. Adam failed, and sin entered the world. But now, in this garden, the second Adam stands firm.

Paul later explains this clearly:

Romans 5:19

¹⁹For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous

God is not repeating history; He is redeeming it.

John 18:4-14

⁴Then Jesus, knowing all that would happen to him, came forward and said to them, "Whom do you seek?" ⁵They answered him, "Jesus of Nazareth." Jesus said to them, "I am he." Judas, who betrayed him, was standing with them. ⁶When Jesus said to them, "I am he," they drew back and fell to the ground. ⁷So he asked them again, "Whom do you seek?" And they said, "Jesus of Nazareth." ⁸Jesus answered, "I told you that I am he. So, if you seek me, let these men go." ⁹This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken: "Of those whom you gave me I have lost not one." ¹⁰Then Simon Peter, having a sword, drew it and struck the high priest's servant and cut off his right ear. (The servant's name was Malchus.) ¹¹So Jesus said to Peter, "Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has given me?"

Jesus Faces Annas and Caiaphas

¹²So the band of soldiers and their captain and the officers of the Jews arrested Jesus and bound him. ¹³First they led him to Annas, for he was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, who was high priest that year. ¹⁴It was Caiaphas who had advised the Jews that it would be expedient that one man should die for the people.

The phrase 'knowing all that would happen to him' is important. Jesus is not ignorant of what lies ahead for Him. He is not mistaken about the cost that He will pay with His own blood.

John tells us that He 'came forward.' The verb here indicates intentional movement toward danger. Jesus does not wait to be found. He does not hide among the trees. Jesus knew. He knew the arrest. He knew the trial. He knew the lies, the lashes, the mockery, and the nails. He knew the weight of the cross and the darkness of judgment. And yet He went forward. Not reluctantly. Not hesitantly. He steps into the flickering light of the lanterns and torches and speaks.

'Whom do you seek?'

This is not Jesus seeking an answer, He already knows who it is that they are looking for. Instead, it is a question given with the voice of authority. Jesus is taking control of the encounter.

Jesus does this for a two reasons.

First, He is protecting the men who are with Him, He steps from the dark into the light, leaving his disciples behind him in the shadows. By stepping forward Jesus has drawn the attention of Judas, of the soldiers, the officers and the chief priests upon Him.

Secondly, he is forcing them to name their intentions. Their will be no vague intentions in the garden, no hidden motives, the time for plain truth has come.

They answer, '**Jesus of Nazareth**'

Jesus was not known as Jesus of Bethlehem, or Jesus son of Joseph, or Jesus the carpenter, or even Jesus the rabbi. He was Jesus of Nazareth—a despised place, it was meant to be a way to diminish Him.

As Nathanael once said,

John 1:46

⁴⁶Nathanael said to him, “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Philip said to him, “Come and see.”

They intend the name to diminish Jesus. But Jesus does not defend Himself. He does not correct them. Instead, He reveals who He truly is.

John tells us, '**Jesus said to them, 'I am.'**

In Greek, Jesus says '*egō eimi*'. These are not filler words. This is the same language used in the Septuagint of Exodus 3:14, where God reveals His name to Moses: 'I AM WHO I AM.'

We have heard this phrase repeatedly throughout the Gospel from the mouth of Jesus; 'I am the bread of life,' 'I am the light of the world,' 'I am the good shepherd.' Here, Jesus stands before armed men and simply says, 'I am.'

And when He does, something extraordinary happens. 'When Jesus said to them, 'I am,' they drew back and fell to the ground'. This is no accident. This is not surprise or intimidation. This is a momentary unveiling of divine glory. Roman soldiers, temple officers, and Judas himself all fall backward. The verbs indicate a sudden, forceful reaction. They are undone by the authority of His word.

This moment makes something unmistakably clear: Jesus is not being overpowered. He is not losing control. He is allowing Himself to be taken. He could escape. He could keep them on the ground. But He does not, because His mission is not self-preservation—it is redemption.

And notice when this display of power occurs at exactly the moment that Jesus is about to submit to arrest. Glory and humility together. Power displayed in surrender. This is God's pattern. Jesus was born as a humble baby, announced by angels. Laid in a manger, marked by a star. Baptized as if a sinner, affirmed by the voice of heaven. He slept from exhaustion, then calmed the storm. He wept at a grave, then called the dead to life. He surrendered to arrest, and said, "I am." He died on a cross, and defeated sin, death, and Satan.

God often displays His glory in the midst of humility.

Jesus then asks again, '**Whom do you seek?**'. This is not repetition. It is pastoral control of the moment. He is preventing panic. He is restoring order.

When they answer again, '**Jesus of Nazareth,**' He tells them, "**I told you that I am. So, if you seek me, let these men go.**"

John immediately explains the theological significance: '**This was to fulfill the word that he had spoken: 'Of those whom you gave me I have lost not one''**

This is the heart of the Shepherd. You want Me? Take Me. But let them go.

That is why He knocked them down—not to escape, but to establish authority for the protection of His disciples.

Every one of those eleven will one day suffer for the gospel. Most will die for their faith. But not yet. They are not ready. Jesus knows what His people can bear, and when they can bear it.

Peter, however, acts out of fear and impulse. He draws his sword and strikes at the servant of the high priest, cutting off his ear. It is clumsy, ineffective and desperate.

And Jesus immediately corrects him. '**Put your sword away. Shall I not drink the cup the Father has given Me?**' Peter's loyalty is sincere, but misplaced. The kingdom will not come through force. Redemption will not be achieved by violence. The cup must be drunk. The "cup" is a well-established biblical image of divine judgment. Jesus is not avoiding it. He is embracing it in obedience to the Father's will.

Jesus is then led to Annas and then to Caiaphas, the man who had earlier reasoned,

John 11:50

⁵⁰ Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish."

John reminds us of that statement here because it exposes the heart of the opposition. Caiaphas' reasoning is logical, but it is not moral. Logic divorced from righteousness always leads to injustice.

Scripture is clear:

Proverbs 17:15

¹⁵ He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous are both alike an abomination to the Lord.

Meanwhile, Peter follows at a distance.

John 18:15-18

¹⁵ Simon Peter followed Jesus, and so did another disciple. Since that disciple was known to the high priest, he entered with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest, ¹⁶ but Peter stood outside at the door. So the other disciple, who was known to the high priest, went out and spoke to the servant girl who kept watch at the door, and brought Peter in. ¹⁷ The servant girl at the door said to Peter, "You also are not one of this man's disciples, are you?" He said, "I am not." ¹⁸ Now the servants and officers had made a charcoal fire, because it was cold, and they were standing and warming themselves. Peter also was with them, standing and warming himself.

He enters the courtyard. He stands by the fire. And when a servant girl asks him, '**You also are not one of this man's disciples, are you?**', Peter answers, '**I am not**'. It is not a rehearsed denial. It is not defiant rebellion. It is fear. Surprise. A moment he was not prepared for. And he fails.

And that leaves the text pressing a question upon us: when the moment comes quietly—unexpectedly—will we confess our association with Christ, or will we distance ourselves from Him?

Ask yourselves what does faithfulness look like for those who belong to this Jesus?

Peter stood by the fire, warmed himself among those who did not know Christ, and when the moment came—quietly, unexpectedly—he denied his association with Him. Not in open hostility. Not with raised fists. Just with a simple, fearful, 'I am not.' And that is often where discipleship is tested—not in dramatic moments, but in ordinary ones, when confession would cost us comfort, acceptance, or safety.

Jesus once told His disciples, '**You are the salt of the earth**' and '**You are the light of the world.**'

Salt preserves. Salt flavors. Salt resists decay. But salt only works if it is distinct. **‘If salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored?’**

Light, He says, is not meant to be hidden. **‘A city set on a hill cannot be hidden,’** and **‘people do not light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house’**

Now place those words next to John 18.

Peter stands near a fire meant to give warmth, but he does not give light. He blends in. He preserves nothing. He flavors nothing. In that moment, he is neither salt nor light. He is simply trying to survive the night. And friends, if we are honest, we recognize ourselves there. How often are we tempted to warm ourselves at the world’s fires while keeping our allegiance to Christ quiet? How often do we hide the light, dull the salt, and soften the confession?

Jesus does not fail. Jesus does not stand back. He steps forward. Jesus does not say, “I am not.” He says, “I am.” He shines His light in the darkest moment. He preserves His disciples by placing Himself in harm’s way. He lives out perfectly what He preached. He is the true Salt who preserves His people, and He is the true Light who shines in the darkness—and the darkness does not overcome it.

And because He stood firm, because He spoke openly, because He surrendered Himself faithfully, He now sends His disciples, including weak ones like Peter, and people like us, back into the world as salt and light. Not in our own strength, but in His. Not to hide, but to shine. Not to blend in, but to bear witness.

When the moment comes, when the question is asked, when the fire is warm and the pressure is real, will we say, “I am not,” or will we belong openly to the One who said, “I am,” for us? Because the world does not need hidden light or tasteless salt. It needs disciples who stand, confess, and shine—knowing that the Savior who went forward into the darkness goes with them still as they proclaim God’s Word as His Salt and His Light in this dark and broken world.

Let us pray,

Almighty, eternal and righteous God,
 we humbly thank you for revealing your divine will to us in your law
 about what we should do and what we should avoid.
 We also humbly pray, for Christ’s sake,
 that you would work in us true obedience,
 graciously forgive us all our sins of negligence,
 and strengthen and lead us by your Holy Spirit

that we begin to serve you in new obedience here,
 until we come to complete holiness before you
 in that life to come;
 through Jesus Christ, your Son, our Lord. **Amen.**

Invitation to Offering

Offering

Offertory Prayer **(Congregant Prepared)**

Closing Hymn #146: "Angels From the Realms of Glory" (V 1,4,5)

Angels from the realms of glory,
 wing your flight o'er all the earth;
 ye who sang creation's story,
 now proclaim Messiah's birth.

Refrain:

Come and worship, come and worship;
 worship Christ, the newborn King.

Saints, before the altar bending,
 watching long in hope and fear,
 suddenly the Lord, descending,
 in his temple shall appear. (Refrain)

Though an infant now we view him,
 he shall fill his Father's throne,
 gather all the nations to him;
 every knee shall then bow down. (Refrain)

Pastoral Prayer

Eternal God,
 a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday.
 They pass as quickly as one night's watch.
 Whatever the significance of this new year,
 yesterday morning was the same as the dawning of every day
 since you first created life and light and proclaimed it all "very good."

We acknowledge your lordship over the world you have made
and over the creatures you have placed in it.
We acknowledge your lordship over us—
feeble creatures who vainly strive to be masters of the universe
you made and over which you still rule.
We are very impressed with our technology—
indeed, it is very impressive—
but our inventions are made with the brains and skills
and the knowledge and zeal that you impart.
As we move further into this new year,
we affirm with confidence your lordship in the future,
based on our conviction that you have been Lord from the beginning.
We are sure of nothing as we face the future,
except that you remain Lord of the world
that you created and that you still love.
You have filled us with the light of your Word,
made flesh in Jesus Christ.
Let the light of faith shine in all we do,
that the one who is from everlasting to everlasting—
yet who was born among us and lived with us—
may continue to inspire the thoughts of our hearts
and the actions of our lives.
As you have led us in days past, so guide us now and always,
that our hearts may learn to choose your will
and our new resolves be strengthened.
Help us to face the future with confidence,
knowing that you have guided and led your people through the eons past,
and knowing also that you are a personal God,
concerned not just with the mighty forces of wind and weather
and of the destiny and fate of nations
but also with the joys and sorrows that characterize our lives.
You have filled us with the light of your Word,
made flesh in Jesus Christ.
Let the light of faith shine in all that we do,
that the one who is from everlasting to everlasting—
yet who was born among us and lived with us—
may continue to inspire the thoughts of our hearts
and the actions of our lives.
Bless especially this day those who are in need:
the people we do not know, whose hope for the future
is not buoyed by the experience of blessing in the past,
who have not known healing, or faith, or prosperity,

and who have no hope.
Bless also those known to us who need
to sense your healing presence today—
for those in need in our congregation and others who we know are in need
You have been our God in ages past,
and we know that you will continue to be our God in years to come.
In the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ we pray, **Amen.**

Benediction

May the love of God surround you,
the wisdom of Christ guide you,
and the power of the Holy Spirit encourage you
as you joyfully proclaim:
Our world belongs to God!
Amen.