

Sermon Transcript

John the Witness

Psalm 40:1-11 and John 1:19-42 | Second Sunday of Epiphany | January 18, 2026 | Pastor John Klawiter, preaching

Grace and peace to you my friends in Christ,

I'm John. (wave) Not Jonathan. Not Johnny. Just John. This has made things much easier than I could have ever realized. Easier than it is for one of my favorite comedians, Nate Bargatze.

Nate had a complicated experience going through airport security.

To see how difficult a few letters can make, here is Nate's retelling of what happened **(VIDEO)**.

Names matter.

One thing I noticed about our gospel is the value and importance of names. Names and titles in John's reading matter. They mean something. One of the most obvious is Simon **(SLIDE)**, a fisherman, who Jesus immediately names "Peter".

Peter??? Why does he call him that? Because Peter is Cephas. The Rock **(SLIDE)**. Very early in John's telling of the story, we learn that this disciple will be important.

The rock that Jesus will build the church on... but Peter is a very flawed rock. He makes so many mistakes and misjudgments, yet Jesus is patient. Jesus continues to teach him.

I think another interesting part of Peter's story is how he is invited to follow Christ. Peter doesn't discover Jesus. His brother does **(SLIDE of Andrew/Simon)**.

Andrew, not Drew. Not Andy. Andrew. Andrew is behind the scenes who finds a boy with bread and fish and brings him to Jesus to feed a crowd of 5,000. Andrew is the brother of someone ALWAYS loud and out front, Peter. Yet HE recognizes who Jesus is first.

Andrew and Peter are actually followers of JOHN.

John has disciples long before Jesus and one of them, Andrew, hears John declare that Jesus is the Lamb of God. John calls him the Chosen One.

And it's behind-the-scenes Andrew who tells Simon, soon to be the Rock, that Jesus is the Messiah.

We might be a bit confused by John's uncertainty on who Jesus is. We just read the gospel of Luke last year and it was pretty clear that they were related.

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Wouldn't John know his cousin, Jesus?

Yet, the way this gospel is written is more about the theological connections. For John, this is an epiphany—a recognition of who Jesus is and what his existence means.

This Jesus will symbolize so much hope in the middle of such threatening and uncertain times.

Jesus will be sought out. Like Nicodemus, a Pharisee, a strict follower of the law, who goes out at night to hear what Jesus says. In a few weeks we'll explore that passage deeply, but one part will stand out for you.

Nicodemus asks Jesus to teach him... and it's confusing. Finally, Jesus speaks directly about the purpose (**SLIDE of Bible passage**): "For God so loved the world, he gave his only Son, so that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.... Take a breath... there's more. God sent the Son not to CONDEMN the world, but to save it."

What a powerful message to draw us in. The purpose and mission of God is love. Life. Salvation.

Yet our religion is often weaponized—or a justification. People do questionable behaviors or act in ways that don't align with our values, but I often hear "oh, but they are a Christian."

Really? Did they repent when the behavior was discovered? Did they help a neighbor even if it meant exposing their own actions?

This is the message that John, not the writer, not the disciple, but the John in our story, has for his followers:

It's John the one who baptizes in the wilderness. Notice, he's not called John the Baptist. If anything, if this gospel was our primary source about what we knew about John, I think he'd get a different title.

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John isn't about himself. He's about Jesus. About the one who's coming to save the world. John has followers and when Jesus comes, points them to him.

John sees things how they are and speaks the truth. His humility can be witnessed in John 3 when he says, "I'm not the messiah. YOU are the witnesses. Because of Jesus, my joy has been fulfilled. Jesus must increase and I must decrease!"

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It's not about me, it's about God. It's not about what I want, it's what will serve the world.

You know me as Pastor John. I've had other nicknames and titles over time. My kids call me Dad. Sometimes they think they're being funny and call me... Pastor John.

But when I'm at drill for the Army, I'm "Chaplain" or "Chap". (SLIDE) I wear a cross on my patrol cap and on my uniform, so if people see my name and don't wanna try to butcher my last name, they just say "Chaplain."

I literally don't know if anyone in the Army knows my real name. Yet the title of Chaplain carries a lot of responsibility.

I was talking to parents of a Soldier recently—they told me how important I was for their son while he was at boot camp in another state. I was??? I was confused.

I knew that this wasn't me—I wasn't there with him—yet, to these parents, that chaplain cared for their son and therefore, I cared for their son.

My commander called me yesterday after she'd just checked in our Soldiers. Spirits were up. It was time to hurry up and wait.

She said, "I also talked to the ministry team and they're all set. They're present and ready."

I know who's there on the ground with them. When the Soldiers see the cross on his cap, the title of chaplain will carry over—they are in good hands. He will care for them.

I wait, ready to step in and replace when necessary. We remind Soldiers that this is our neighborhood. These are our neighbors. We are here for them.

My friend, Major Tsuchiya said that the National Guard is "staged and ready to respond," Minnesota National Guard spokesperson Army Maj. Andrea Tsuchiya said in a statement to CNN, noting the troops will help provide "traffic support to protect life, preserve property, and support the rights of all Minnesotans to assemble peacefully."

My commander, who's not a religious woman, asked me to pray for cold—that it might deter chaos and fights from breaking out. You got it boss, I told her.

What is our role in this?

We witness to what's happening. We see that neighbors are in dire need. Neighbors are hurting, hungry, traumatized.

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That's where our faith kicks in. Because it's not just about our individual efforts. None of us can save our city or save our state or save our country, or even save the world. We can't do it.

But when we work together as the people of God. Man, crazy things can happen.

(SLIDE of Community Outreach) Wanna help? Here's one way. Neighbors need to eat and they won't leave their homes. Help us out. We're gathering food—we might need you to pack items in the future.

I can't believe the network of people I've met in the last few weeks. It's mind-blowing. People want to help. They don't want destruction. They don't want violence. They don't want more death.

They want their community back in their own hands.

It's not always the message I see on the national media platforms. They've got their own story to tell.

I'm here to witness to you, we here in Minnesota, on the ground, want love back. We want peace. We want our neighbors to feel safe to leave their house. That's what we stand up for.

We are a resilient bunch. Maybe that's our title. We'll be known for our resilience and compassion.

Don't judge. Learn

Don't ignore. Help

Don't gossip. Witness

Faith Lutheran... you are the rock. You are the church that cares. Why? No matter what, we put Christ first. Be witnesses to that promise. Amen