

Sunday, 18 January 2026 – Second Sunday after Epiphany

Hymn of Response - *Precious Lord, Take My Hand* was published in 1938 as *Take My Hand, Precious Lord: Solo for Prayer and Meditation*. Thomas A. Dorsey (1899-1993) was born near Atlanta, Georgia and moved to Chicago in 1919. In 1931 he helped establish the first gospel choir at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Chicago and then went on to lead the gospel choir at Pilgrim Baptist Church in Chicago for 60 years. He wrote the text of this beloved hymn in 1932, a week after the death of his wife in childbirth and the subsequent death of his newborn son.

Precious Lord was Martin Luther King, Jr.'s favorite song. On April 4, 1968 he requested musician Ben Branch play *Precious Lord* at a meeting that evening. "Ben, be sure you play my favorite song tonight, *Precious Lord*. Play it real pretty." Those were the last words Dr. King spoke before being slain by an assassin's bullet. Mahalia Jackson sang the song at his funeral on February 9, 1968 at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WduYIw8Yrnw>

Special Music - On Feb. 4, 1968, two months before he was assassinated, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. gave a sermon called, *The Drum Major Instinct*. In it, he imagined his own funeral and said he wanted to be remembered for serving others, not for his fame or his many accomplishments. He ended the sermon by quoting from *If I Can Help Somebody*. Dr. King first heard this song in Denver in 1956 and later encouraged Mahalia Jackson to record it, which she did in 1963. <https://youtu.be/okzmXyoSKeg?si=kIjzWE216mRiUnUG>

Offertory Anthem - Richard Smallwood (1948-2025) was born in Atlanta, Georgia and graduated from Howard University with a music degree in 1971 and Master of Divinity in 2004. He was a founding member of the Howard University Gospel Choir and was ordained as a minister at Washington, D.C.'s historic Metropolitan Baptist Church in 2004 and subsequently became the church's Artist-in-Residence.

Smallwood composed one of his best-known songs, *Total Praise*, in 1996 when he was caring for his mother who was experiencing dementia and a family friend who was dying of cancer. Of the piece Smallwood said: "I felt left by God, I was trying to write a pity-party song, but God pulled me to do a praise song. God said, 'I want your praise no matter what the situation you are in, good or bad.' It's about trusting him."

The Reverend Richard L. Smallwood died in Sandy Spring, Maryland, on December 30, 2025, due to kidney failure at the age of 77.

Recessional Hymn/Postlude - *We Shall Overcome* is recognized as the unofficial anthem of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. It was popular with folk singers, including Pete Seeger. Joan Baez led a crowd of 300,000 in singing *We Shall Overcome* at the Lincoln Memorial in August 1963. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. recited the words to the hymn in Memphis on Sunday, March 31, 1968 during his final sermon before being assassinated the following week.

Composer Carl Haywood is a native of Portsmouth, Virginia. Dr. Haywood served as director of choral activities at Norfolk State University and for twenty-six years he served as organist/choir director at Grace Episcopal Church, Norfolk. *Improvisation on We Shall Overcome* was composed for the MLK service at St. James's Church, Richmond, Virginia.