

*Come, Spirit of Christ – show us Your way, teach us Your truth, fill us with Your life. Amen.*

This morning we celebrate a promise: a promise of belonging,  
a promise of inclusion, a promise of acceptance and adoption and life.  
We celebrate that every Sunday, but particularly today, when Heidi and Christopher  
Guttenberg officially becoming God's own people, we say "yes" to that invitation.

St. Peter wrote to some early Christians, people who weren't too sure of their  
status, that they were a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people.  
If ever you wonder if you are worth anything, if you belong to anyone,  
that's an amazing description: royal, holy, claimed. That's wonderful,  
or perhaps daunting or off-putting, depending on your perspective.  
But if we're made in the image of God, we need to ask: Who is God?

That is where most theologians begin. They begin with God and get to us.  
And the Bible helps us along a little, because it tells us we were created in  
the image of God," male and female, he created them."  
That tells us right there that male and female are included in God,  
that God has no gender. And Genesis implies that God was there before us,  
because God made us, made Adam, human, out of the dust of the earth.

So God is old. Very old. Very God of very God, light of light.  
Very creative, very powerful, very big.  
And if we're made in God's image, we have only to look at ourselves  
to know what God looks like, right? Like the old joke, that God made us in  
God's own image, and ever since we've been trying to return the favor....

If God looks like us, we're in a bit of trouble.  
Because I wouldn't want to worship a God who was just like me. Lord help us.  
So the people of God have had to account for how it is we could be made in the  
image of God, and now bear so little resemblance to One who is old,  
has no gender, is all-good, all-powerful, all-knowing.  
That's where the story of human rebellion and sin, judgment and mercy come in.  
We are made in the image of God, but that image has become irrevocably  
tarnished in us, so tarnished we could no longer know what God looks like  
just by looking at each other. We needed a fresh copy.

So Philip says to Jesus, "Show us the Father and we will be satisfied."

And Jesus says, "If you've seen me, you've seen the Father."

As the writer to the Hebrews put it:

*... in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.*

*The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.*

Jesus reflected a particular human identity:

he had Semitic features, spoke Aramaic, had Galilean manners...

but in his words and actions he made God known.

The Son is the exact representation of his being.

Not a physical being – an I AM being! Jesus tells his followers,

I am the way you're going to see the Father – you look at me, you're looking at him!"

I am the truth you say you're looking for – when I talk, the Father's speaking.

I only say what God tells me to say."

I am the life you've been craving – life here, and life forever, with the Father."

"If you have seen me, you have seen the Father" would be the most presumptuous statement in the world – and some of his listeners thought it the height of blasphemy – but his authority and his actions bore it out.

We are here, worshipping him, or at least exploring a relationship with him, two thousand years later.

We are called into this place every week, because we are followers of Christ, or at least inquirers into Christ;

because we believe Jesus is not only prophet, teacher, healer, example,

but God himself, God with us. And we want the world to see God through us.

We are doing something so radical today – we are saying to Heidi and Christopher:

as wonderful as you are, we're going to let that merely human person die with Christ and be raised with Christ in a new life that begins right now.

You are starting a relationship with Jesus that is within you –

you'll carry him everywhere. (Christopher literally means "bearer of Christ.")

And if we are going to live up to the promise we're about to make,

that we will do everything in our power to support these two saints in their life in Christ, we need to let the Jesus in us be visible in our words and actions.

There's a story I once heard about a particular tribe in Africa. Maybe it's true:

*When a woman this tribe knows she is pregnant, she goes out into the wilderness with a few friends and together they pray and meditate until they hear the song of the child. They recognize that every soul has its own vibration that expresses its unique flavor and purpose. When the women attune to the song, they sing it out loud. Then they return to the tribe and teach it to everyone else.*

*And when children are born into the village, the community gathers and sings their song, one unique melody for each unique child.*

*Later, when children begin their education, the village gathers and chants each child's song. They sing again when each child passes into the initiation of adulthood, and at the time of marriage. Finally, when the soul is about to pass from this world, the family and friends gather at the bedside, as they did at birth, and they sing the person to the next life.*

*There is one other occasion upon which the Villagers sing to the child: If at any time during a person's life, he or she commits a crime or aberrant social act, that individual is called to stand in the center of a circle formed by all members of the tribe. And once again the villagers chant the child's song. The tribe recognizes that the proper correction for antisocial behavior is not punishment, but love and the remembrance of identity. When you recognize your own song, you have no desire or need to do anything that would hurt another.*

Friends, a Christian community is one in which all know we are God's own people, and we learn each other's songs so well we can sing them back to each other when we need to be reminded – reminded of our beauty when we feel ugly; our wholeness when we feel broken; our holiness when we feel ashamed; our purpose when we are confused.

We need to learn Heidi and Christopher's songs, and each other's.

And we need to know Jesus' song.

Do you feel you know Jesus as well as you'd like to? Do you want to know him?

Then tell him that. That's where it starts. When we say, in our hearts,

“Jesus, I want to know you more. I want to know who you are.

“I want to follow you. I want to walk with you. I want to tell you about my hopes and fears at the beginning of the day, and about what happened at the end of it.”

And then do something about it, just like you would with anyone in your life you wanted to know better. Plan to spend some time, more time.

Get to Bible study. Join a prayer group. Find a spiritual director.

Talk to your friends, your priest, your siblings at church.

This is our primary call in life, to know this Jesus,

who somehow manages to show up in our lives.

Because He already knows us. And He already loves us. And he chose us.

God made himself known in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus said to his followers, "You are my body now – you are how people will see

God. You will do greater things in the Spirit than you saw me do.

The Spirit of Christ in us shows the world who God is.

We just need to sing God's song.

*Amen.*

### **John 14:7-14**

Philip said to him, "Lord, **show us the Father**, and we will be satisfied." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and **you still do not know me**? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on my own; but the Father who dwells in me does his works. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, **will do greater works than these**, because I am going to the Father. I will do whatever you ask in my name, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it."

### **I Peter 2:2-10**

Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For it stands in scripture: "See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.

To you then who believe, he is precious; but for those who do not believe, The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner, And a stone that makes them stumble, and a rock that makes them fall."

They stumble because they disobey the word, as they were destined to do. But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.