

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

You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people.
How do those words wash over you? Chosen, royal, holy, belonging.

Those are powerful words, powerful descriptors of our identity in Christ. These words were uttered by Peter, Jesus' close disciple, who heard him say on his last night among them, "I no longer call you servants; I call you friends. You are chosen, chosen to bear fruit that will last." And before that he said this: "*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.*"

Greater works than Jesus had done? Who could do that? Those who are *a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people,* chosen to bear fruit *In order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*

I don't imagine that listening to him that night, sensing trouble brewing, they saw themselves doing any mighty works, but later, by the time Peter wrote or spoke these words, he had seen enough to know that Jesus meant it. As we read the book of Acts, we see these men and women, time after time, doing amazing, mighty works – or rather, the Holy Spirit working through them. As the Spirit will work through you, through me, through us, as we allow.

Once again, Jesus' words are somewhat confusing. He tells them he is going away, that he will prepare a place for them, and they know how to get there.

When Thomas, ever the literalist, says,

"We don't know where you're going; how can we know the way?"
Jesus says, "I AM the Way! You know me, you know the way.
Those places Jesus is preparing for them, for us, are not "up in heaven."
They are right here. Right now.

See, I believe word confusion caused a major distortion in the church's understanding of the Good News. Jesus is not talking about heaven here – he's talking about the spiritual realm he calls the Kingdom of Heaven. Because in the 16th century, "spiritual realm" was translated "the heavenlies," and because we use the word "heaven" to describe that place we go when we die, they got conflated. "Heaven" became a place "there" and "later."

Yet Jesus taught consistently that the Kingdom of God is already. It is here, it is now.

“The Kingdom of God is among you, on your lips and in your heart.”

That's what Jesus' miracles were meant to demonstrate: Look, it's already here!

Oh, it will be “here-er and now-er,” complete, one day, when this time has run its course, but that other life is already running, right alongside this one, like particles of air and water intermingling in what we breathe in.

But once the church started talking about “up there” and “later,”

we lost the heart of Jesus' message: “I have come to make all things new.”

All things – you, me, poisoned oceans, oppressed peoples, victims of Covid-19...

all things new. He said, “I have come that you might have life abundantly”

When Jesus talked about eternal life, he didn't mean it only in a temporal, chronological, what-happens-after-we-die way.

“Eternal life” is “the life of the ages,” or “the life that is truly life.”

The life that will be has come to us now, right now; here, right here;

all the “here's” we are experiencing right now – here at home, here together.

What if we re-translated all those familiar verses...

*“For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten son to the end that we should not perish, but have **the life of the ages, the life that is truly life.**”*

*“I have come that you might have **eternal life** – not only later –*

but the life of the ages, the life that is truly life, right here, right now.”

Jesus makes some hardcore promises in this passage:

“If you know me, you will know my Father also.

From now on you do know him and have seen him.”

That promise isn't in the future tense. “You do know God because you know me.”

*“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.”*

Does that not suggest that Jesus expected his followers to continue his

“Kingdom-bringing” ministry in this world now?

He counters Thomas' questions about where he's going with a not-so-subtle nudge

to focus them on continuing the ministry of transformation – personal, societal, global; the ministry of transformation that he initiated, that he “showed forth.”

Maybe that cryptic “You know the way to the place I am going,” really means:

You already have it. You already know it. You know ME.

I AM the Way, Jesus says. It means He is the pathway, the road, the direction.

We walk in His footsteps, his will animating our own; we cooperate with his Spirit in helping to bring about the fullness of the God's Realm.

We don't have to read maps and try to figure out the Way –
we just need to know Him, and as we discover Him, we find our way to God.

What does it mean to say Jesus is Truth, especially in an age that sees truth
as relative – “your truth” and “my truth?”
It means Truth is not a set of statements we assent to or not –
it means Truth is a person we can be in relationship with, introduce others to.
And as we get to know Him, we find ourselves centered in Truth, swimming in it.

What does it mean to say Jesus is Life?
Life is God's first gift to us, and God's life is what we've been promised for
eternity. But eternity starts the moment we were baptized into Christ's life.
Life in Christ – life with Christ, life centered around a relationship with Christ,
makes the rest of life richer.
The life worth living is the one with engagement and clarity and passion.
Jesus offers us that Life, as we receive him into our lives –
daily prayer, weekly worship, all ways we cultivate our relationship with Jesus.

It all comes down to that, my friends, that Jesus offers us relationship with God.
And out of that relationship come the gifts and power to do “greater works,”
To *“proclaim the mighty acts of him who called us out of darkness.”*
I believe much will be asked of us in coming months,
to be light-bringers, hope-bearers, peace-makers, healers...
This shut-down is essential, and we're not ahead of the curve enough to re-open.
And the economic devastation is also real – this will be a time to share resources
so everyone has enough, not only in our communities but in places around the
world so poor there are no wealthy neighbors – we'll need to be those neighbors.
And maybe we'll have some bold ideas about what our “greater works” will be.

One thing I know is they already exist in the mind of God.
We will discern them, not dream them up.
We don't have to live according to old scripts, scripts of scarcity and striving.
Jesus has written a new script, a promise:
*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.*
Bring it on! Amen.

John 14:1-14

Jesus said, "Do not let your hearts be troubled. **Believe in God, believe also in me.** In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, so that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way to the place where I am going." Thomas said to him, "Lord, we do not know where you are going. How can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "**I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.** If you know me, you will know my Father also. **From now on you do know him and have seen him.**"

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."

1 Peter 2:1-10

Rid yourselves of all malice, and all guile, insincerity, envy, and all slander.

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.