

Last week Caleb and a friend took the sunfish sailing out on the lake. It was a beautiful day with a great sailing breeze. We couldn't see the storm approaching from the other side of the mountain, but then, we heard thunder. The sky grew dark. The wind and waves suddenly became overpowering. Thunder rolled heavier and heavier. Paul and I looked at one another with concern. Paul said, "Should I go out in the motor boat and find them?" "yes," I said. So, in a drenching downpour and a gusty wind, Paul went in search of the boys, who were at first thrilled with the heavy wind and the crazy speed of the boat. But when another boater passed by them and told them that their mast was a lightening rod, they got worried and decided to get home as quickly as possible. Several times the boat threatened to flip and toss them in the stormy water. Meanwhile, Paul crisscrossed the 8-mile long lake looking for them. He began to panic: why couldn't he find them? Had they flipped or taken shelter somewhere? Paul decided to return home and call 911. When he got back to the dock, there was the sunfish: the boys had arrived back at the dock well before Paul because someone had offered them a tow. It turned out they couldn't protect themselves from the storm. Someone else had to do that by bringing them safely home.

Jesus does this for us all the time. He is constantly drawing us in and bringing us safely home to God—not because we are perfect or because the church is perfect, but because he knows us and loves us and wants to draw all people to himself.

There is no test to see if you are in Christ, as if you could measure yourself or anyone else to determine if you or they are "in Christ". To be "in Christ" is not of our doing. It is the doing of Jesus Christ himself. He chose you and gave you the gift of baptism, the sacrament of belonging and forgiveness that seals us as Christ's own forever. Through baptism we have a new identity where everything old has passed away and all is made new in Jesus Christ. This means that we can do nothing to earn God's love. It is already given. In Christ we are

the beneficiaries of his love, which means there is nothing we can do to separate ourselves from it, either.

From Paul's letter to the Ephesians we learn that we are blessed, chosen, holy, blameless, adopted as God's children, redeemed, forgiven, marked with the seal of the promised Holy Spirit, and made into God's people. None of this comes from our abilities, expertise, or skill. The only way to benefit from this new reality is to claim it as our true identity. We are Jesus' disciples—not because we are good at it, but because he chose us. Yes, believe it or not, we are who we are by the grace of God and the only way to realize the gift of that grace is to claim our identity as Jesus' chosen ones. It's not about us: it's about Jesus—it's about our being in Jesus and Jesus being in us. By adoption as God's own children, we have been brought into a place where we can discover that we are related to one another through the mystery of God's desire and love for us. We have been chosen, called, and sent forth into the world to be bearers of that love to everyone we meet. This is our true identity. We have been chosen by a loving God to be a people forgiven, blessed, chosen, and sealed by the Holy Spirit as belonging to God through Jesus Christ.

Henry Nouwen writes that “Spiritual identity means we are not what we do or what people say about us. And we are not what we have. We are the beloved daughters and sons of God.”<sup>1</sup>

A man who had been a student of his came back to the school to visit. Their conversation was marked by warm and gentle moments of silence. The student told Henri, “When I look at you it is as if I am in the presence of Christ.” And all Henri could say was, “It is the Christ in you, who recognizes the Christ in me.” “Yes,” the student said, “He indeed is in our midst. From now on, wherever you go, or wherever I go, all the ground between us will be holy ground.” This is the meaning of Christian community.

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<sup>1</sup>: [https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/henri\\_nouwen\\_588373](https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/henri_nouwen_588373)

Our community of St. Matthew's is not built on our own capacity to get it right. We have labored and loved and suffered, and our bonds of love have been stretched, tried, challenged, and proven. Even when it looks like the opposite might be true, we are a community built on God's capacity for boundless love. We are a community forged by God's passion to draw us ever more deeply into our true identity. We are God's people. We belong to God through Jesus Christ—a people loved, forgiven, and called. Yes, each of us and all of us together have been called to be the people brought together for just one purpose: to be the place where Jesus' grace and love are freely offered.