

SERMON
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“Questions & Answers”

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Confirmation

Sometime around the year 600 BC, the prophet Jeremiah wrote about these words about God’s message to the people of Judah:

“If you brag, brag of this and this only: That you understand and know me”.(Jeremiah 9:23)

But, how do we begin to know God? This is just one of the questions that Iris and Isabel have been wrestling with over the last year as they prepare for confirmation.

Our United Church *Song of Faith*, begins with these words about God : (SLIDE)

*God is Holy Mystery,
Beyond complete knowledge,
Above perfect description.*

That’s very reassuring – because that means, that no matter how hard we try to define and describe God, a complete and perfect description is beyond our grasp. What we can say, however, is that we know with all certainty that:

...in love, the one eternal God seeks relationship

Iris and Isabel have come to a stage in their journeys of faith when they feel the need to confirm this relationship with God. So, I asked them, ‘How would you describe God’ – and here’s their answers:

Iris – Isabel

In our second scripture reading today, Jesus asked his disciples, ‘who do they think I am?’ It might seem an easy question, but they have several different answers. Simon Peter, decided to back all the horses and give three answers to the question, saying:

“You’re the Christ, the Messiah, the Son of the living God.”(Matthew 16:16)

These might sound all the same answers to you, but in a course that I am currently doing as part of my M. Div, called “Who IS Jesus”, we have been theologically unpacking the differences in each of these names.

Our Song of Faith reminds us that Jesus is both human and divine (SLIDE)

*We sing of Jesus,
a Jew,
born to a woman of poverty
in a time of social upheaval
and political oppression*

*Jesus announced the coming of God’s reign- ...
He preached and practised unconditional love - ...
... in him people experienced the presence of God*

It reminds us that he came to bring hope and joy (SLIDE)

*He was crucified
But God raised Jesus from death,
turning sorrow into joy,
despair into hope.
We sing of Jesus raised from the dead...
The Risen Christ lives today,
present to us and the source of our hope...
We sing hallelujah.*

So, Isabel and Iris have been thinking about who was and is Jesus to them? And these are their answers:

Iris – Isabel

In our discussions together, we have chatted a lot about the Triune God – and what exactly is the Holy Spirit? This might be a question that anyone of us here might struggle to answer. The *Song of Faith* describes the Spirit as: SLIDE

*We sing of God the Spirit
...creatively active in the world
...challenges us to celebrate the holy
...speaks our prayers of deepest longing
...enfolds our concerns and confessions
...transforms us and the world.*

So the girls have both answered the question of How would they describe and experience the Holy Spirit?

Isabel – Iris.

Becoming confirmed, means publicly saying that you have a faith in Christ and consider yourself a Christian. But what exactly does that mean?

The word 'Christian' is only used three times in the New Testament, and each time it refers to the early believers, called "Christians" because their behavior, activity, and speech were like Christ Jesus. Christian means to be 'Christ -like'.

The *Song of Faith* says that being a Christian means : (SLIDE)

*...witnessing to the good news;
...comforting the grieving and guiding the wandering
...standing with the oppressed and working for justice.
To embody God's love in the world.*

Iris and Isabel, answered the question this way:

Isabel - Iris

I think it is fair to say, that none of us have all the answers! For myself, the more I learn in seminary, the more questions I have. In the last few months, working with Iris and Isabel, we have chatted about some of the big questions of faith, using the *Song of Faith* as our guide.

(SLIDE)

Questions like Creation, and understanding how each part of creation reveals something about God the Creator.

Tough questions about sin – and acknowledging how at some point in our lives most of choose to turn away from God, and ways that we are all broken, but how God forgives, reconciles, and transforms us. (SLIDE)

Together, the three of us have looked at different books and translations of the bible; and discussed ways of reading scripture as a living word to guide and inspire us.

And we've spoken about what is heaven, and how it is beyond our imagination.

None of us have all the answers. And, I asked both the girls to think about what are some of the big faith questions that they still struggle with?

Iris – Isabel

Today, Iris and Isabel are both making an important step in their journeys of faith. They are not only publicly declaring their faith, but they are also both expressing their desire to be full members of the United Church of Canada, here at Knox United. Over the past months, we have chatted about the history of the United Church of Canada, and what it is we believe today. Our *Song of Faith* declares (SLIDE)

That we are church with purpose. Nurturing, comforting, sharing gifts, expressing love in the face of violence, and a church with a mission. I asked both Iris and Isabel – what is about the United Church, and Knox, that makes them want to become members – and they said:

Iris – Isabel

These have all been tough questions to think about – and I am sure all of us would struggle to give an answer. I think both Iris and Isabel have shown us that they are very ready to make the next step in their faith journeys. And so, as they renew their promises of baptism today – let us all remember our promises of faith (SLIDE) that:

In and with God,

*we can direct our lives toward right relationship
with each other and with God.*

We can discover our place as a strand in the web of life

We can grow in wisdom and compassion.

We can recognize all people as kin.

Creating and seeking relationship,

in awe and in trust,

we witness to Holy Mystery who is Wholly Love. Amen.