

Good morning everyone, my name is Mark and I'm one of the pastors here at North Shore Alliance Church; we are blessed to have you with us this morning and trust that you will be blessed by being in our midst.

I want to begin this morning by asking all of you a question, and I'm going to need you to be as honest as you can. By a show of hands, how many of you would say that you have an excellent sense of direction? Men, are you being honest?

Naomi can attest to the fact that I have an awful sense of direction; she is the navigator nearly every time we get in the car. If you were to tell me that your house or business is located on the north side of such and such a street, I would smile, nod, and have a 25% chance of getting it right. When Naomi and I are in a shopping mall, moving in a particular direction, and then duck into a store to do some looking, when I come out I need to stop and look both ways before I can determine which direction we are supposed to be going. The only place I never get lost is running in the forrest...bizarre.

How many of you have travelled in a non-Western country before? It can be even more disorienting--now we are dealing with a different language, different road signs, different rules--it can be easy to lose our way. Praise God for GPS! GPS, combined with smartphone technology, has revolutionized the way I get around and navigate through unfamiliar territory; with a few keystrokes, a global positioning satellite can tell me where I am and where to go.

But before GPS, even before the compass, sailors navigated by the North Star. The North Star is positioned almost directly above the

North Pole and it served as "true north;" it gave the sailors a reference point on the horizon so that they wouldn't get lost.

It seems to me that when it comes to the living of our lives, our needs are no different; we need a reference point outside of ourselves. We need to know where to go, how to get there, and most importantly, who we are supposed to be. There is so much identity confusion in the world and even in the church; many of us feel set adrift and lost.

How about you? Do you know who you are? Who you were meant to be? Do you find yourself trying on new selves like a model changes their clothes? Do you find yourself shifting, morphing according to the loudest voice in your head at any given moment? Are you still trying to get over the labels you were given in high school (nerd, jock, loser, popular)? Are you drowning under the weight of the labels you received from your parents, spouse, or boss (lazy, good-for-nothing, redundant, high-performer)?

When it comes to identity, we've all had reference points outside of ourselves: some good and some bad. In my 15 years of pastoral ministry, I've had dozens and dozens of identity conversations with people who are struggling. Somewhere along the way they believed some kind of lie about themselves and now they are limping along. Do you want to hear some of the lies?

- *I'll never amount to anything.*
- *I've got nothing to offer.*
- *I'll never find love because I'm not pretty enough.*
- *I'll never find love because I'm not worth loving.*
- *If I don't perform well, I'll never find love.* Love is a big one...most of us tend to believe lies in the area of our greatest desires.

- here another one: *my past history is the predictor of my future.*
- *I am insignificant.*
- *I will never break free from my addiction...my addiction is who I am.*
- *If people see the real me, they will reject me.*
- *I can't trust anyone.*

Unfortunately, I could keep that list going--so could you. I suspect that some of us here today wouldn't mind being the victim of identity theft, as long as it was full-scale--that way we could start over.

What if I told you that Jesus could give you a fresh start? That He already has? What if I told you that you could discover your true identity, not by looking within, not by listening to the voices around you, but by looking to the One who made you? Would you believe me? All of us need a "North Star," a reference point, and the One who made us is the One who can tell us who we really are.

Over the next 8 weeks, we are going to be teaching our way through a series entitled "**In Christ: discovering our true identity**". The next 8 weeks will be predicated on the biblical idea that as followers of Jesus, it is impossible to speak about who we are apart from reference to Him.

And as I introduce this series, I have to begin with one of the greatest phrases found in the entire New Testament: **In Christ**. These two words, when we take them to heart, pack a massive punch. In these two words, we can discover, or rediscover, our true identity. These two words are changing my life and they can change yours---not the words, but the One who stands behind them. **In Christ**--these days, for me, there are no sweeter words. Over the next 8 weeks, I pray

that the Spirit will will bury these words in our minds and burn them on our hearts. Holy Spirit, teach us who we are in Christ.

This morning there is a specific truth that I would like to unpack with you: **In Christ we are new creations**. But before I get there, I've got to back up the bus and talk with you about what "**In Christ**" really means.

I've been looking at these two words from multiple angles for weeks now, and you'd think that I'd be able to give a simple explanation and move on, but I can't. On the one hand "*in Christ*" is a **spatial term**--we might talk about something being in a bowl, or in our house, but what does it mean for something to be located in Christ?

"*In Christ*" is also a **theological term**--it refers to what God has done, or is doing for us in and through Jesus Christ. "*In Christ*" is also a **relational term**--it speaks to the relationship we have now have with God through Jesus.

And, "*in Christ*" is also a **mystical term**. We speak regularly about "following Jesus" but we cannot forget that something more fundamental has taken place. When we confess our faith in Jesus Christ, our lives are inextricably bound up with, and connected to, His life. Through faith, we have been united with Him--Jesus takes what is ours, and we receive what is His.

Spatial, theological, relational, and mystical--it's contained in the words "**In Christ**". Don't worry about trying to figure it all out in 8 weeks--consider the next 8 weeks an appetizer--these two words are meant to sustain us for the rest of our lives.

So let's go a little deeper; what does it mean to be "*in Christ*?" At the heart of the Christian story we find the cross. And the reason we find the death and resurrection of Jesus at the centre of the story is because death is central to the human predicament.

Romans 3:23 says that all have sinned, all fall short of God's perfection, all have rebelled against His authority. Death is the result of living life apart from God. The Bible speaks both of physical death (which we will all experience) and spiritual death (an eternity of separation from God and all that is good)--you'll be happy to know that spiritual death is optional.

Scot McKnight writes, "God knows what we go through, and not just as an [all-knowing] God who happens to know us along with everything else, but as one who *knows* us by participating in our condition. He is with us in our living and our dying, in our joys and our sorrow, in our good days and our bad days...God has entered... into our sin and its sufferings."<sup>1</sup>

The good news is that Jesus has entered into our evil, our sin, and our suffering in order to subvert it. Jesus defeated death by taking on our sin, our punishment, and dying for us, dying instead of us.<sup>2</sup> Jesus stands in our place and does for us what we cannot do for ourselves.

Death is central to the human predicament, and the cross is God's saving action through Jesus--the death and resurrection of Jesus

brings life to all who receive Him. But here's the thing--the Bible talks about the death and resurrection of Jesus as a saving act because it is an incorporating act.

Listen to the words of Romans 6: "**3** *Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? **4** We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. **5** For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. **6** For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— **7** because anyone who has died has been set free from sin."*

The language of the New Testament makes it clear that when Jesus died, we died with Him; when Jesus was raised, we were raised with Him. His death is our death, His life is our life; we are saved by being drawn into union with Jesus.

And so it's not out of step, to talk about co-crucifixion and co-resurrection with Jesus; listen to the words of Galatians 2:20. "*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*" Now of course, we didn't physically die with Christ--the Bible is employing mystical language here--but

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<sup>1</sup> Scot McKnight, *A Community Called Atonement*, 108.

<sup>2</sup> McKnight, 69.

we were included with Him in His death, so that we might be included with Him in His life. Jesus took on our humanity, He became what we were, so that we might receive all that is His.<sup>3</sup>

Everything good thing that we receive from God, flows from being “**In Christ**”. The term, “**In Christ**,” is a spatial, theological, relational, and mystical term--who we are, how we live, what we receive all flows from being **In Christ**. **In Christ** we have a rich inheritance. **In Christ** there is life, forgiveness, transformation, freedom, power, and love--all of it stems from being united with Jesus. **In Christ** we have access to all that He is and all that He has.

I want to encourage you to try an experiment for the next 30 days. Every time someone asks you where you live, instead of saying “in Lynn Valley” or “in West Van,” respond by saying “*I live in Christ*”. Now, you’ll get some strange looks, but saying the words will cement you in your true identity.

**Illus:** I’ve been wracking my brains for a few weeks, trying to come up with something visual that communicates what it means to be **In Christ**; some of us are visual learners, and when we see something, we remember it. Are you all familiar with Russian Nesting Dolls?

The idea is very simple: a series of dolls are made, often out of wood, with each doll smaller than the one before. Each of the dolls is hollow on the inside, and so, the dolls fit inside one another. What appears to be one large doll, is actually a host for each of the others.

Colossians 3:1-3 says, “*Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.*” If you have professed your faith in Jesus, inviting Him to forgive your sins, then you have been included **In Christ**, you have been hidden with Him in God.

**Illus:** You may have noticed that Colossians 3 expands the circle somewhat. I’ve been talking this morning about being **In Christ**, but being **In Christ** means being connected to life with the Father, and the Spirit as well.

Let me attempt a physical analogy, and for this attempt I want to call on a few of our trusty staff members to join me on stage: Dave/Mardi, Keith, and Alana. These three are going to represent the Trinity for us: Father, Son, and Spirit. They’re going to go ahead and link arms with one another, representing the common life, and love of the Trinity.

We could say of this Trinity circle that life lives here, that love lives here, that holiness/righteousness/purity lives here, that glory lives here. If I were to look at this circle and then look in the mirror, I would have to confess: *one of these things is not like the others*. **But**, all of that changes because of Jesus: in Christ we are forgiven, in Christ we are saved, in Christ we are incorporated into the life of God.

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<sup>3</sup> McKnight, 104.

By virtue of the fact that I am **In Christ**, I have been ushered into the circle. I'm included because Jesus is included, I'm accepted because Jesus is accepted, I belong because Jesus belongs and I am united to Him. There's a lot of love in this circle...I can feel it! **In Christ**, this is where we belong.

So many Christians limp along in their lives because they suffer from a fundamental identity crisis. They know who Jesus is, but they don't know who they are...all they can see is who they were before they met Jesus. The cross has become for many a place of perpetual guilt and shame; the cross reminds us that we were the reason Jesus died.

And while this is true, it is an incomplete truth...incomplete truths have a way of burrowing into our hearts and incapacitating us. We were the reason Jesus died; so great was our sin, and so great was His love. But the death of Jesus satisfied the wrath of God. Did you hear that? The death of Jesus has satisfied the payment for our sin.

If you are **In Christ**, then "sinner" is no longer the label written over your life. **In Christ**, you are a new creation, you've been adopted as His son or daughter, you are God's beloved, you're free from condemnation, you are God's handiwork, you've been marked by God's power, you're a citizen of heaven, you're God's servant/friend/co-worker. And over the next 7 weeks, we're going to be looking at each of these in detail.

Perhaps the reason you struggle mightily is because of an ongoing identity crisis; you know who Jesus is but you don't know who you are in Him. If you're limping along on persuasive lies or half-truths, it's time for a trade-in--it's time to discover your identity **In Christ**. Remember...the truest words ever spoken about you are the words

that God speaks. It's time to turn down the volumes on all those other voices, and tune into His voice.

I have something that I'd like to play for you this morning that I trust will help us to believe what God says is true; let's take a look.

- **Video: He is my identity** (3:29), <http://www.sermonspice.com/product/10263/he-is-my-identity-worship-as-a-new-creation-love>

**In Christ**, this is who we are: new creations. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says, *"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he/she is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!"* **In Christ**, we can know the freedom our heart longs for.

The Bible says the old has gone--guilt, condemnation, separation--it's all gone because of the death and resurrection of Jesus; we've been set free. But it's more than being set free **from** something, we've been set free **for** something. We've been set free for the new--for a life lived with and for God. You have been destined for life, for transformation, for calling, for meaning and purpose. You have been made in the image of God, you've been made to showcase His glory, and by the power of the One who lives within us, we are being renewed, restored, and remade day by day.

Brothers and sisters, **In Christ**, this is who we are--this is who we are becoming. But in many ways, it really comes to down to who we're going to believe, and which voice we will tune into. We can swallow the half-truths and lies and limp along; God will still love us. But there is another way to live, another Voice that speaks what is true and can deliver on His promises. We have a choice to make. We've

been hidden with Christ in God--let's live in keeping with our true identity.

- **Response Song:** *In You.*
- **Worship:** *In Christ Alone*
- **Benediction**