



# Sunday January 11, 2026

## Second Sunday after Epiphany

There is a story about the 41st president, George H. W. Bush, visiting a nursing home. Walking down the corridor with his aides and all the reporters, he came across an elderly man moving slowly in the opposite direction. The president reached out, took the man's hand and asked gently, "Sir, do you know who I am?" The man looked blank for a moment and focused, shook his head and said, "No, I don't know who you are, but if you ask the nurses, they could tell you."

I'm feeling this is one of these kind of stories you can put any one's name in there that you want. But, do we know who we are? That is a question that shadows us and follows us all our lives. Having a clear sense of identity, who we are, whose we are, and what we are for shapes a life of purpose. There's nothing more unbearable than living without meaning in our lives, without feeling loved or accepted. As Maya Angelou once put it, there is no greater agony than bearing the untold story inside of you. Our task is to uncover that story, to name our gifts, to claim our worth, and discern how we are called to use ourselves in service of others. Our gospel today, in Jesus' baptism, centers actually on identity. Before Jesus' baptism, people were asking John the baptizer if he was the Messiah. John did not answer the crowd's hunger for a celebrity or a status. He knew who he was. He was the one to prepare the way and point to the one who would embody God's reign. In Jesus' baptism, the heavens open in the spirit to sense like a dove, the dove, the ancient symbol of the spirit and of hope, lands on Jesus and marks Him as God's beloved, as that voice cried out from the heavens. Notice something radical here. Jesus has not yet begun his public ministry. He hadn't yet healed anybody, he wasn't preaching, he hadn't overturned the tables at that moment. You see, the spirit came first. The blessing comes first. God's love was the beginning and foundation of all that Jesus would do.

This flips the common cultural script that says to be loved and welcome and dignity are our rewards that we must earn by success, productivity, or image. We think about it, we live in a culture that makes us doubt our worth all the time. Today, the pressure to be seen or proved often comes through what



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we see on social media feeds, the influence or economies that tell us our value depends on how much we are attentive to that and how much we consume. Our current economy demands even more hustle, targeted ads and debt-based consumerism, all about the promises that our belonging is through whatever our next purchase is. Well, it delivers less for us. And ironically, it's harder now than ever for those millennials and the generation Zs to purchase their first home, to save for retirement or just to save it all. All these forces sharpen insecurities and grind away at the truth that we are beloved, not because of what we own or can accomplish, but because God has chosen us. Baptism then is not a credential of moral achievement. It is just a visible reminder that God has named us beloved. God says, "You are my child, I take you by hand, I am pleased with you." God's love is unconditional and baptism shows us who we are and sets us up for our vocation for life.

Vocation here is not merely just personal comfort or private piety. When the Spirit descends on Jesus it is the Spirit that empowers His ministry of teaching, healing, and bringing justice. Isaiah's voice, which the church reads, that we heard today, that points to Christ, says of the servant, "I have put my Spirit upon Him and He'll bring forth justice to the nations." That prophetic work bringing justice, which we heard repeatedly in Isaiah, it's not an option, it's not an add-on, it's intrinsic to what the Spirit does in and through Jesus and in and through us. To be baptized is to be anointed for the mission, the work of mercy, of reconciliation, the dismantling of systems, and the value human life. We are called to counter the sin of indifference, those sins we confront are not only those individual failures, but those structural evils that surround us, the economic injustice, the immigration systems that tear families apart, environmental degradation that imperils the poorest communities, unequal access to health care, all the ways in our society that makes human worth contingent on profit and performance. If the Spirit's gift to Jesus enabled Him to heal and to call the excluded back into community, then the Spirit's gift to us is to do the very same thing, to stand with those who are pushed to the margins, to argue for living wages and affordable housing and advocate for



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humane immigration policies and support, most of all, restorative justice, and to protect God's creation. That's what it means to have our baptismal identity shape our common life, to bring God's justice and mercy and peace into everyday civic choices. We don't have to have designer clothes or a polished brand to do this, only fidelity to the Spirit who calls and equips. Each one of us is a servant whom God upholds and delights in. God delights in you. God loves you. You are God's beloved child.

So, what we're going to do today is remember this and recall this as we move forward throughout the year, we're going to renew our baptismal vows right now. So, trusting in the mercy of God, will you, will we turn away from the ways of sin and renounce indifference to the suffering of others? If you will say, I do. Will you turn to Jesus Christ and accept Him as Lord and Savior and follow His way of love that seeks justice and mercy and humility for our world? Will you? Will you be Christ's faithful disciples showing His love, working for reconciliation, defending the vulnerable and participating in the transformation of the world? Will you? Know this that the center message of baptism is You are beloved. We are beloved, not for what we can accomplish, not for what we like, or how many people like our social media posts, but simply because we are God's child. We, we are God's children. We have God's favor and God has called us.

So again, as we start this new year, let us recall that identity and let the spirit's power move us from being known and feeling the knowledge that God loves us because that's is what will make a difference. That is what will comfort the afflicted. That is what will advocate for the voiceless and pursue justice for all that heals, that can heal and restore. As we go into this new year, may we be filled anew with that Holy Spirit to do God's work in our neighborhoods, in our workplaces, in our families, in public life. May our baptismal identity as God's beloved children propel us to love our neighbors as ourselves and to work for a world. Let us work for a world where every person is treated with dignity and respect. Amen.