

Thank you, Bill... and many thanks to the Sharon House board, for the opportunity to metaphysically... prayerfully... practically... support the mission of Sharon House... and to talk with you all today!

It is such a joy... and a privilege... to work with these dedicated board members, who are so actively loving Sharon House and Christian Science nursing; and likewise to be with you all, who are joining with them today in that active love.

Our theme, “Whom say ye that I am?”, comes from a conversation between Christ Jesus and his disciples, recorded in all three synoptic Gospels – Matthew, Mark, and Luke.

This question points to a foundational idea – an idea that is important to explore, and strive to understand, deeply... spiritually... scientifically. It points to identity.

Why is it important for us to explore and strive to understand identity?

It takes us to the very nature of our being, doesn't it? It provides the starting point for every thought and act... every aspect of our experience. Understanding who we truly are – the truth about everyone, everything – is a prerequisite to right purpose and activity... and the realization of God's kingdom come, God's will being done.

“To begin rightly is to end rightly” we read in the Christian Science textbook – *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy (page 262).

Turning to dictionary definitions can be helpful as we seek to understand ideas.

Let's consider the idea behind the word “identity”.

When we look up “Identity” in an etymological dictionary we find that the root meaning is “sameness”; “oneness”.

So... if the essence of identity is in sameness or oneness, it would seem to imply that the identity of anything isn't in itself; it's in whatever it is the same as or at one with... right?

That, then, begs the question, *same as or one with... what? Or whom?* And that would lead us to origin, source, or creator.

Now, let's turn to our Pastor, and see what we find there about identity.

In the Bible, we go to the first chapter of the first book – Genesis – which means “origin”; “creation”. There, we learn that God... divine Spirit is the starting point.

“In the beginning, God ...” we read in Genesis 1 verse 1.

We then see that man – male and female – was created in the image and likeness of God. (Gen. 1:27)

And that God, Spirit, made all that was made, and “it was very good.” (Gen 1:31)

In our textbook we read,

“There is but one creator and one creation.” (SH 502:29 (only))

“God fashions all things after His own likeness.” (SH 516:9 (only))

“...He is divine Principle, Love, the universal cause, the only creator, and there is no other self-existence.” (SH 331:18–20)

And,

“Identity is the reflection of Spirit, the reflection in multifarious forms of the living Principle, Love.” (SH 477:20–22)

What we learn about identity in Christian Science – from our Pastor -- is clearly consistent with those dictionary definitions, isn’t it? Identity is reflection – sameness, oneness. It comes straight out from God and is inseparable from God, who is the one and only source or origin; the divine Principle, Love; the creator of all.

You’ve probably noticed that we have two chapters in *Science and Health* that deal rather specifically with the origin or source of our being: “Creation” ... and “Genesis”. That would seem to indicate the importance of this true sense of identity in the teachings and practice of Christian Science... wouldn’t it?

So... identity has its source in God, Spirit.

What about that source? What about the identity of God?

According to the Hebrew scriptures, when God spoke to Moses out of the midst of the burning bush and called him to lead the children of Israel out of Egypt into the Promised Land, he introduced himself to Moses as, “the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.” (Ex. 3:6)

Helpful... but Moses needed to know more.

After that initial introduction, Moses asked a question about his own identity:

“Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children Israel out of Egypt?” (Ex. 3:11)

God replies, “Certainly I will be with thee...”

Moses then seems to realize that his first question, “Who am I...”, was the wrong question.

He then asks a better question – a question about who God is. Who is this “I” who will be with him?

“...when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is his name? what shall I say unto them?”
(Exodus 3:13)

Moses has realized that he needs to know God better... to understand His nature... and help the children of Israel to know and understand Him as well. What he hears this time is not about the past... it’s not about God’s relationship to ancestors in prior generations, it’s about now –

“I AM THAT I AM... Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you.”
(Ex. 3:14)

This shows Moses the nature of God in the present, and indicates that inseparable relationship between source and expression -- divine Love and each of Her ideas -- that is always so relevant and reassuring; and especially so for Moses, in light of the journey ahead of him.

Now let’s look again at Christ Jesus’ question, “Whom say ye that I am?”

As you may recall, his first question to his disciples that day was, “Whom do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?” (Matt. 16:14)

The disciples’ response indicated only the misconceptions people had about Jesus: some thought he was John the Baptist, some Elijah or Jeremiah, or another prophet somehow reincarnated.

So, Jesus asks again, this time to determine how his closest students see him. Do they hold those same misconceptions?

“Whom say ye that I am?”

Simon Peter’s response hits the mark: “Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.”

And his response gets to the pure sense of identity, indicated by the root meaning of that word. Jesus is the Christ, the promised Messiah, the Son of the living God. Not a human personality, but the idea or expression of the one God. His identity -- sameness, oneness – is defined by God... his Father; the source... the origin... of his being.

This pure sense of identity – this spiritual accuracy – is important to understand about everyone and everything, isn't it? It determines whether we are beginning with fact... or hearsay; reality... or misconceptions; Spirit... or matter. Perhaps that's why Jesus was "yearning to be understood", (as our textbook tells us), when he asked this question.

Whatever situations we may be in; whatever opportunities we may be exploring ... or steps we need to take, can best be addressed by starting with the pure spiritual ideas – the absolute truths – that define the identity of whatever or whomever is involved. Because those pure spiritual ideas connect us with their sameness or oneness with God – the source of all that is true. The one perfect Mind.

Christ Jesus repeatedly shared statements that conveyed his pure spiritual identity – his oneness with God. In the Gospel of John, we find seven such statements. The first is:

I am the bread of life. (John 6:35) And in this case, he elaborates a bit:

- *I am the bread which came down from heaven...* (John 6:41)
- *I am the living bread which came down from heaven...* (John 6:51)

Then:

I am the light of the world... (John 8:12)

I am the door of the sheep... (John 10:7)

I am the good shepherd... (John 10:11)

I am the resurrection and the life... (John 11:25)

I am the way, the truth, and the life... (John 14:6)

I am the true vine... (John 15:1)

Each one captures an aspect of his identity... his Christliness, his sameness and oneness with God... doesn't it?

Another reason why it's important for us to have a deep and spiritual understanding of identity is because it so often gets challenged. There is so much that seems to argue against our ... and others' ... pure, spiritual identity as ideas of God; so much that suggests inconsistencies... separation... misconceptions.

Christ Jesus was yearning to be understood... and was he? Were his words and works and all that was true about him acknowledged? The Jewish leaders didn't seem to understand... or accept... what he said and did to make his identity clear. Again, in the Gospel of John, we read

that the Jews asked him, “Who art thou?” And Jesus replied, “Even the same that I said unto you from the beginning.” (John 8:25)

Even John the Baptist, who had initially described him as “the Lamb of God” and “saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove” and resting on Jesus, later sent two of his disciples to ask him, “Art thou he that should come? Or look we for another?” (Luke 7:19)

Not surprising then, that we may find that we need to consistently deepen our understanding of our own and others’ true spiritual identity; then to live it ... and be ready to defend it. In spite of appearances to the contrary, to continue affirming our ... and everyone’s ... sameness and oneness with God... the reflection of our Father-Mother, divine Love; perfect ideas, inseparable from their source and creator, perfect Principle.

I had a simple experience that was helpful to me in understanding... and holding to... my... and others’ true identity as God’s reflection.

One day as I was finishing getting ready in the morning, I looked at myself in the mirror to straighten the collar of my blouse. It was a dark blue blouse, and I noticed something on the front of it, so I started to brush it off. But it didn’t come off. Then I took a damp washcloth to wipe it more thoroughly... but that didn’t remove it either. Then I looked down directly at my blouse... and there wasn’t anything there. But when I looked at the reflection in the mirror, there were spots on it. I then realized that the spots I saw on my blouse when I looked at it in the mirror were water spots on the mirror... not anything on me. A citation from *Science and Health* came to mind:

“... compare man before the mirror to his divine Principle, God. Call the mirror divine Science, and call man the reflection. Then note how true, according to Christian Science, is the reflection to its original. As the reflection of yourself appears in the mirror, so you, being spiritual, are the reflection of God. (SH 515: 28-4)

This was so helpful! I’d been struggling with an inharmonious relationship with someone I worked with and this was the healing idea I needed. And so it proved to be.

I have thought of this often since then. If we look at ourselves and others in the clear, spotless mirror of divine Science, we will see how true the reflection is to its original. We will see the image and likeness of God. But if we look into any other mirror... mortal beliefs, human theories and opinions, personal sense, and so forth... we see spots... flaws... imperfection... not the pure, spotless reflection of the perfect spiritual original.

That citation from *Science and Health* continues,

The substance, Life, intelligence, Truth, and Love, which constitute Deity, are reflected by His creation; and when we subordinate the false testimony of the corporeal senses to the facts of Science, we shall see this true likeness and reflection everywhere. (SH 516:4)

So... if what we're seeing isn't true to its original... isn't consistent with the nature of God... Spirit... do we believe it? Do we go along with the misconception, react to it? Become confused or discouraged, worried or fearful? No... we acknowledge and affirm the truth of God's perfect spiritual creation – uninterrupted and everywhere-present; the expression of the Mind that is Love. We look into the mirror of divine Science and see the true reflection.

Now, here we are today, gathered as friends of Sharon House.

And why is that? Simply because another year has passed?

It could seem so... but isn't it more because we love Sharon House and want to support her?

And how can we best do that?

Might it be by acknowledging and honoring her pure, spiritual identity?

Might it be to consider our response if she were to ask us, "Whom say ye that I am?"

Our response could include a look back at the first "Sharon House", where, in 1893, as Christian Science practitioners in Toronto, Emily Shankin and Daisette Stocking looked after their patients who needed loving care from fellow Christian Scientists. We could recount the activities in the 1950's and 60's related to the Sharon House Trust, ... then the Sharon House Corporation and the homes they operated. And then, the building of the lovely house we have today, which opened in 2000. It could include a review of what's been happening since 2000 at Sharon House. Yes – it could include a lot of looking back. But how much would all of that really honor ... and accurately identify ... Sharon House... today? Would that be the *best* answer to the question, "Whom say ye that I am?"

Of course, we can... and certainly should... be grateful for all the good that has flowed so lovingly out from activities bearing the name "Sharon House" over many years. They are beautiful expressions of Christly generosity, compassion, and selfless love. But we want to answer the question, 'Whom say ye that *I* am?' We are here to honor the Sharon House of today and support her steps forward.

Perhaps the best answer comes out from those words, "I am". "*Whom say ye that I am?*" There's no looking back there. We want to get at the *identity* of Sharon House – her *sameness* or *oneness* with her source -- the pure spiritual idea that is, here and now, coming out from that source and moving ahead.

It's helpful to realize that looking to the source or origin of an idea does not require looking back. The name, or nature that God gives Moses when he asks God his name is, "I AM THAT I AM."

In the Glossary of our textbook, the definition of God begins, "The great I AM..."

There's a "nowness" to that phrase, "I AM", isn't there? Likewise, then, for all that God...the great I AM... creates. In the chapter "Genesis" in our textbook, we read,

Creation is ever appearing, and must ever continue to appear from the nature of its inexhaustible source. (SH 507:28-29)

So... to honor Sharon House today... let's focus on her pure, spiritual identity in the context of the "I AM". As the reflection, or expression of -- the sameness, or oneness with -- her source and origin; the great "I AM" she expresses, here and now: the activity of Spirit, the intelligence of Mind, the order of Principle, the beauty of Soul, the freedom of Truth, the vitality of Life, and the love of Love.

To help us do that, let's take another look at the question "Whom say ye that I am" in Christ Jesus' conversation with his disciples. As we consider the pure spiritual identity of Sharon House, let's again consider why the answer to this question was so important to Jesus. As we noted earlier, Mrs. Eddy describes him as "yearning to be understood..." (SH 137:8)

Simon Peter's answer, which Jesus praised -- blessed him for -- connected him to his Father, the one almighty God, the source of his identity and of all that he did. Peter replied, "*Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.*" (Matt 16:16)

It moved thought away from personality to the impersonal Christ, "God with us". It didn't look back at the ancient prophets but acknowledged the now of his identity... his oneness with God - the expression of God's presence and power. And Jesus acknowledged that Simon Peter didn't arrive at that understanding of him through the evidence of the senses or human opinion. He says, "...*Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven...*" (SH 137:22-24) Simon Peter's response comes out from the very source of Jesus' identity -- his heavenly Father... and shows us that that's where Simon Peter would have had to look for it.

Then... that right answer becomes the foundation for the fulfillment and continuity of Christ Jesus' mission. "... upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." (Matt 16:18)

This clear understanding of Jesus' spiritual identity as the Christ, the Son of the living God... was a necessary standpoint for what was to come. It would be needed to support the apostles'

fulfillment of their individual and collective missions; for perpetuation of the activity of the healing, saving Christ; and to *defend* all of that in the face of challenges and misconceptions.

So... why is this important for us to consider today?

It gives us the context for this gathering, doesn't it? It helps us to better understand the "I am" of the pure spiritual idea we know as Sharon House. Just as Peter so accurately answered the question "Whom say ye that I am" in relation to Jesus – "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God", we must accurately answer this question in relation to Sharon House. We must look to the source of Sharon House's identity... so our response will also be worthy of a blessing... and serve as a solid foundation for all that is to come as Sharon House continues to fulfill her God-given mission.

Sharon House's pure spiritual identity includes her pure spiritual purpose – her unique mission – and the fulfillment of it. And, as we saw in the conversation between Simon Peter and Christ Jesus, that identity is foundational to her continuity.

Like Christ Jesus', Sharon House's identity, purpose, and mission are built on the Rock...the rock upon which Jesus would build his church; and her identity, purpose, and mission also relate to Church; Church with a capital "C".

As many of you all are probably aware, Sharon House has a mission statement which can be found on her website. It is:

"To support Christian Science nursing and its availability to those relying on Christian Science for healing... and to show the practicality and power of God's love."

This mission statement begins with Christian Science nursing. An idea we all love, and certainly want to support! So, let's explore *its* pure, spiritual identity.

As we know, Christian Science nursing is defined and provided for in a By-Law in the *Manual of The Mother Church* – Article VIII Section 31 – "Christian Science Nurse". This By-Law reads, in part,

A member of The Mother Church who represents himself or herself as a Christian Science nurse shall be one who has a demonstrable knowledge of Christian Science practice, who thoroughly understands the practical wisdom necessary in a sick room, and who can take proper care of the sick. (Man. 49:7)

Placing this By-Law in our *Church Manual* places Christian Science nursing in the structure of our church. This is key to its true spiritual identity. And it is important for us to acknowledge... and understand... and defend.

Sometimes it can be tempting to place Christian Science nursing outside of Church... or on the edge of it... perhaps with one foot in Christian Science and one foot in the realm of healthcare. That word “nurse” can trip us up a bit ... since it tends to be strongly associated with medical care and hospitals. But when we get to the original meaning -- the pure idea behind the word “nurse” -- we find no references to materia medica. Its root meaning is to nourish... to nurture. Dictionary definitions include:

- To nourish, to cherish, to foster
- To promote growth or vigor; to encourage
- To caress

These definitions point us to Christ-like love, don't they? We see nursing to be Christian rather than secular. Associated more with Church, than with a hospital. They show nursing to be consistent with Christ Jesus' own ministry as well as his command to his followers to love one another. The Gospel of John records that command:

A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

And then, he tells us why it is important to be obedient to this command:

By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another. (John 13:34, 35) [Emphasis added.]

So, we can see that nursing is, inherently, an expression of Christianity, consistent with its source -- divine Life and Love. The nourishing, cherishing, fostering activity of nursing is loving one another. And when the words “Christian Science” are placed in front of the word “nurse”, that connection and consistency becomes even clearer... and deeper.

It's natural, then, for us to have a provision for Christian Science nursing in our *Church Manual*... and, therefore, to understand the role of the Christian Science nurse in that context. The definition of “Church” in the Glossary of our textbook sheds more light on this:

CHURCH. *The structure of Truth and Love; whatever rests upon and proceeds from divine Principle.*

The Church is that institution, which affords proof of its utility and is found elevating the race, rousing the dormant understanding from material beliefs to the apprehension of spiritual ideas and the demonstration of divine Science, thereby casting out devils, or error, and healing the sick. (SH 583:12–19)

So... Sharon House's mission, “To support Christian Science nursing” connects her with the *Manual By-Law*, “Christian Science Nurse”, and therefore, connects her to Church, as defined in our textbook. Of course, this isn't a formal relationship with the church organization or any sort of legal designation. It's Church with a capital “C”. It is a spiritual relationship – the kind that naturally occurs when two ideas have a common starting point and shared ideals.

The Glossary definition of “Church” then, is worth exploring a bit as we affirm the identity of Sharon House and the true sense of Christian Science nursing. First of all, it shows us that the structure is spiritual – the structure of Truth and Love.

Incidentally, as I was considering this the other day I realized that the structure of Truth and Love is an expression of both masculine and feminine qualities, since our textbook describes the ideal man as corresponding to creation, to intelligence, and to Truth; and the ideal woman as corresponding to Life and to Love. (SH 517:8-10) And, as we know, the By-Law “Christian Science Nurse” also includes both the masculine and feminine. It begins, “A member of The Mother Church who represents himself or herself as a Christian Science nurse...” And likewise, for Sharon House. I tend to refer to Sharon House as “she”, since the name “Sharon” is a woman’s name... but it’s good to take just a moment to affirm the completeness of her identity – reflecting both masculine and feminine qualities – coming out from the Fatherhood and Motherhood of God.

Getting back to our exploration of the definition of Church and its expression in Christian Science nursing... and in the idea we know as Sharon House...

The definition of Church continues, “whatever rests upon and proceeds from divine Principle.” (SH 583: 12-13)

That’s the Rock, isn’t it? The solid foundation on which to build. And divine Principle is Love. The source of the love by which Christians... and Christian Scientists... love one another, as Christ Jesus commanded. The Love that is reflected in love. (SH 17:7)

The rest of the definition articulates what Church accomplishes. “Elevating the race... rousing the dormant understanding from material beliefs to the apprehension of spiritual ideas and the demonstration of divine Science, thereby casting out devils, or error, and healing the sick.” (SH 583:15)

These represent promises, the inevitable outcome of the identity and nature of the source, divine Principle, expressing itself. Divine Principle, Truth, Love is actively, tangibly, practically expressed – in Church... and in Christian Science nursing... and in Sharon House. The By-Law, “Christian Science Nurse”, requires a demonstrable knowledge of Christian Science practice and a thorough understanding of practical wisdom. Sharon House’s mission statement also captures these elements. It affirms a commitment “to support Christian Science nursing and its availability to those relying on Christian Science for healing” ... and ... “to show the practicality and power of God’s love”.

So ... to support the mission and purpose of Sharon House going forward, we have seen how we must begin by properly answering the question “Whom say ye that I am”.

We can do so, by understanding her true identity, the pure spiritual idea that has its origin in divine Love and, by definition, remains at one with that perfect Love.

We can see that clarity about the identity of Sharon House ... is linked to clarity about the identity of Christian Science nursing ... as an activity taking place within the context of Church ... with a capital "C".

That said... even when we begin with a clear understanding of spiritual identity, the path from beginning rightly to ending rightly can have unexpected turns and bumps... and portions that are unpaved. There are sometimes challenges along the way.

So... we steadfastly hold to and *defend* ... our understanding of identity as reflection – at one with its pure, active, spiritual source. We work to consistently see each and every idea... each person, place, and thing... in the mirror of divine Science – perfect, whole, complete – Christ-like.

There is a story – perhaps it is actually an allegory – you may have heard before, that comes to mind here. It's sometimes referred to as "The Rabbi's Gift".

Once a great order, a decaying monastery had only five monks left.

In the surrounding deep woods, there was a little hut that a Rabbi from a nearby town used from time to time.

One day, as the Abbot agonized over the situation at the monastery, it occurred to him to ask the Rabbi if he could offer any advice that might save the monastery.

The Rabbi welcomed the Abbot at his hut. When the Abbot explained the reason for his visit, the Rabbi could only commiserate with him. So, the Abbot and the Rabbi sat together, read from parts of the Torah, and discussed their faiths.

The time came when the Abbot had to leave. "It has been a wonderful visit," said the Abbot, "but I have failed in my purpose. Is there nothing you can tell me to help save the monastery?"

"The only thing I can tell you," said the Rabbi, "is that the Messiah is among you."

When the Abbot returned to the monastery, his fellow monks gathered around him and asked, "What did the Rabbi say?"

When the other monks heard the rabbi's words, they wondered what possible significance they might have.

"The Messiah is among us? One of us here, at the monastery? Do you suppose he meant the Abbot? Of course -- it must be the Abbot; he has been our leader for so long. On the other hand, he might have meant brother Thomas, who is certainly a holy man. Or maybe he meant brother Elrod, who is very grumpy, but also very wise. I don't think that he meant brother Phillip, he's too passive; but ... he always seems to be there when you need him. Of course, the Rabbi didn't mean me. He couldn't possibly have meant me.

As they contemplated the possibilities, the monks began to treat each other with extraordinary respect, just in case one of them was the Messiah; and in turn, each monk began to treat himself with extraordinary respect.

Because the forest was so beautiful, people occasionally came to visit the monastery. They would have picnics or just wander along the old paths. Now, visitors began to sense a powerful spiritual atmosphere. They were sensing the extraordinary respect that now filled the monastery.

Visitors then began to come more frequently. They began to bring their friends, and their friends brought their friends.

Then it happened that some of the younger men who came to visit the monastery started to engage in conversations with the monks. After a while, one asked if he could join them. Then, another and another.

Within a few years, the monastery once again became a thriving order, a vibrant center of light and spirituality in the realm.

It occurs to me that, rather than "The Rabbi's Gift", this story could be called, "Whom say ye that I am?"

It's an example of what can happen when we see God's spiritual creation, here and now -- ever-appearing; when we acknowledge... honor... and defend the pure spiritual identity of ourselves and others; the oneness... and sameness ... of each idea with its divine source.

It shows us what can happen when we *correctly answer* the question, "Whom say ye that I am."

Thank you for being here today... for being part of this opportunity to love and support Sharon House ... and to see... and defend... her pure, spiritual ... identity and purpose.

Before we move on to the next part of our meeting, I'd like to share the words from hymn #593. I wish we could all sing it together, but that doesn't work so well on Zoom; so, we've got the next best thing. After I read it, Ernesto will sing it for us.

*We gather together to ask the Lord's blessing,
To sing of God's goodness as year turns to year.
We gather professing Your grace and Your blessing,
With thanks for the gospel that gathers us here.*

*Your Spirit consoles us. We're safe in Your keeping.
When roads are uncharted, your love shows the way.
Where new hope is springing You fill us with singing;
Your presence delights us with each dawning day.*

*What, then, can we give You in praise for our journey,
When all the earth's treasures were yours from the start?
We offer our labor, our love for our neighbors,
Our gifts and the worship of each hand and heart.*

Thank you again... and God bless.