

Sunday April 26, 2020

Ephesians 3:7-13

Of this gospel I have become a servant according to the gift of God's grace that was given me by the working of his power. Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was giving to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things; so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. This was in accordance with the eternal purpose that he has carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have access to God in boldness and confidence through faith in him. I pray therefore that you may lose heart over my sufferings for you; they are your glory.

Let us pray: God of rich variety, display your great wisdom through us. Alone we reflect so little of our glory, but together we are able to show forth your great glory before all the world. Let us not hide our light under a basket, but let us share boldly for the benefit of all. Amen.

#### "God's Rich Variety"

God loves variety. Just look at the world and you see God's rich variety. Consider the flowers of the field: they are of infinite variety of colors, sizes, shapes and fragrances! If you look at dogs. There is just not one form of dog. There are big ones and small tea cup ones and everywhere in between. They have different coats, some seem almost bald while others look like overgrown mops. Some are loud with voices deep and low, others have high pitched voices that almost sing and some have no voice at all.

God did not make just a few animals, but a wild variety. All of them just fit. All of them amazing. Some look comical and even bazaar. Each of them is needed in a world that God created in perfection. As great as this variety is, God has not finished with his creative artistry, life continues to adapt and evolve around us.

Then there is us, God's people. We have such a variety of temperament. One of the ways to describe a person is with a Myers-Briggs temperament test. People are seen on a scale of Introversion and extroversion, Intuitiveness and Sensuality, Thinking and Feeling, and Judging and Perceptiveness. I am very introverted and intuitive, but a little more feeling than thinking and a little more Perceptive than Judging. I do not believe any two people are exactly the same. We are all unique creations of God, because God loves variety and God sees a need for us all to be just who we are.

As human beings we are made up of many cultural experiences. My parents gave me deep Midwestern roots, but I grew up all over the United States. Every place I lived made changes to my dialect, my vocabulary, my culture expressions, the foods that I am acquainted with. My wife did not experience such variety in her early life, but is another interesting mix as she has traveled the world in her service to the church, gaining experiences that I will never have. Every one of us, is the ever changing mix of cultural understanding, that adds to the rich variety of God's creation.

Each of our religious understandings is also part of God's rich variety. I was brought up in the Methodist Church, but my mother was Apostolic Lutheran, and my cousins were

Evangelical Covenant. All of these have affected the way I relate, to God and my understanding of scripture. My father was in the military and we often attended military chapel, Sunday schools, and youth groups. This gave me a rich mixture of Christian understandings being under the pastoral care of chaplains from many differing denominations. I came to Christ during the Jesus Revolution of the late sixties and early seventies, and lived during the Charismatic movement. All of these events shaped my theological understandings. I have had the grace of five years of graduate education in Theology, I have had sixty-five years of Sunday School, and all of this has helped me become the Christians believer I am. No other human being has had the experiences that I have had shape my life. Just as no one has or ever will have exactly the experiences that have shaped your spiritual life.

This all adds to God's rich variety in the world that shows off God's great wisdom.

To be anyone less than who you are in all of your fullness, is to rob the world of a spiritual gift; YOU! You are God's gift to the church and to the world. What you believe, what you say, what you do is extremely important to what God is striving to do in the world. Without your uniqueness God's work in the world is diminished. When you do not fully engage with the world, then the world has lost the blessing from God, that can only come through your life. This is why it is so important for you to be in worship with others. This is why it is so important for you to be in Bible Study with others. This is why it is so important for you to be in Sunday School together. Because God wants to use your irreplaceable uniqueness to be his blessing to those around you.

What is true about you, is also true about the lives of others. This is why it is so important that no one is excluded from full participation in the life of the Christian community. John Wesley was the first to send out women to preach in his societies. Their voice was important to the vitality of early Methodism. But soon after Wesley died, the voice of women was silenced for the most part until 1956, when women were allowed to be become ordained for the first time. Women have a perspective that men will not have about life. And the church is less than it would be without them and we have been blessed by God with their full participation. The same is true with everyone else.

One of the richest gifts that can be given to a local church is to receive a cross racial, cross cultural appointment. This is because they bring with them a difference that enriches the community. They are able to see the world with fresh eyes, and can speak in a way that expands insights into scripture that could not be shared in any other way. However too often churches feel they are being punished or have received a pastor of less quality, because they do not see the gift being shared with them, nor do they see the possibilities of new ministries.

This being said, we all struggle with difference. When I moved from southern Georgia to central Minnesota, those who heard me speak, found how pronounced my words amusing. I did not talk Minnesotan. I was an outsider, in a place called home.

We feel more comfortable when people act like us, sound like us, behave like us, live like us, believe like us. Sometimes we find it hard to sing a new song, because we are so comfortable with the old songs we have sung for so long that feel like soft slippers on our souls.

Change is difficult because it opens us to the unknown, the unexperienced. Change moves us out of our comfortable binaries, because they do not fit how we have always understood things. But Change is what God gifts us with as we are exposed to the wisdom found in God's rich variety. We become exposed to ideas we have never come across our minds before. We become exposed to how other people are having to live, which may even expose our sins

against them. As we are exposed to God's rich variety, God shares with us the cries of the needy that we have never taken the time to listen to before. We are exposed to the cries of children, sent to prison where they are harmed in ways we have never seen nor understood. We are exposed to limitation placed on the lives of others, that we were never aware of. All this can be painful, but needful, and a gift of God's rich variety being given to our lives through the experiences of others.

To exclude the voices of those who are not like us, is to exclude important parts of the wisdom of God. It is the rejection of a gift that God is seeking to add to our lives. We refuse to listen because we fear that God will change us forever and make us into a new creation that we are not sure we want to become.

My prayer is that you will become more and more open to the rich variety that is the wisdom of God. That you allow God to keep moving your life from glory to glory. May you see that the lives of others are a gift, even when they are a challenge to understand and to appreciate. God believes that we need each other. I believe God is right.

Let us pray: God thank you for the variety of people you have gathered together at Valley Forge United Methodist Church. We know that each one is a precious gift from you. Amen.

Thank you for worshiping with us today. Please continue to send in your tithes and offerings as you can. Keep safe.

Add your prayer requests to our face book page. Feel free to participate in our Wednesday Bible Study.

Now may the one who have created us all with infinite variety, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, be with you and those you love now and always. Amen.