

PASTOR'S NOTES

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

1 Corinthians 12:4-7

*Although I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given 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 now 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...*

Ephesians 3:8-11

The passages above have been dear to me over the years, as a reminder of the importance of our differences in the plan of God. The twelfth chapter of 1 Corinthians and the twelfth chapter of Romans both point out that God has given us differing gifts and responsibilities in order to build up the people. The Ephesian passage goes even further to suggest that the “rich variety” of the church is also a witness to the heavenly realm. As strange as this might sound to us, it should not surprise us, for this world is a testimony to variety and difference. Surely if God decided trees were needed to provide oxygen, God could have created one kind, or one kind of grass, or for beauty, one kind of flower. Presumably God could have decided to feed us with one kind of food, whether one kind of plant or one kind of animal. So why did God do it this way, with all this variety and color? If you’ve never asked that question, perhaps you should stop reading now, and go outside and meditate on the question for a little while (but take your coat, because God also created a variety of seasons.)

For me one of the joys of ministry has been in the discovery of how our differences work together to make our lives worthwhile. I am almost always grateful for the ways in which my wife Sue is different than me, especially in her personality and her ability to see things differently. I have been especially blessed to have persons around me in ministry who don’t think like I do, and open my eyes to new things and new thoughts. Genesis 1:27 says “*So God created humankind in His image, in the image of God He created them; male and female He created them.*” This suggests to me that, among other things, no one of us alone captures the image of God; that it would take at least two, and most likely far more of us than that. I am convinced it is only as we find a way to embrace and utilize the different gifts we bring, that we can truly function as the “body of Christ.” Or, to put it another way, I don’t believe it is an accident that this particular group of people (including me) has been put together in the life of this church. All of us, regardless of how different or mismatched we may seem, are here for a reason.

While I could say much about this topic in relation to the church and our spirituality, consider how that might extend to other arenas of our life. I grew up in a country that was touted as a melting pot of cultures and beliefs; a country that stood as a witness to freedom, liberty, and justice for all. These days we’re not so sure that is how the rest of the world sees us. We are

disturbed by the partisan divide here that seems to be an ever-worsening spiral. On that it seems we agree.

I had an occasion several years ago to talk with a pastor who also happened to be a delegate to the Republican National Convention. Normally, the people of a church don't know a lot about the political leanings of their pastor, but in this case, this was public knowledge, not only that he was a Republican, but which candidate he would be representing. He told me, however, that he had another pastor friend, who was a delegate to the Democratic National Convention. He said they often met or called and prayed together, especially when it was near to the Convention times. "I don't pray that they will become Republicans," he said, "The moment one party wins every contest we are no longer America. But I am convinced that both parties have persons of strong faith, just as they also have many persons of weak or no faith. And I am also convinced that God uses both parties to achieve His purposes. So we pray together that God uses the two of us and the Democratic and Republican parties to His glory."

Now this general ideal is much harder to live out in the real world of specifics. However, I want to suggest that our first step is to recognize that God's plan for us includes all of "them" as well. When Paul says *"There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus"* (Galatians 3:28) and when John recalls a vision of *"a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands"* (Revelation 7:9) they are pointing us to a future that depends on all of us finding a way together. When we decide that others are important in God's plan and treat them accordingly, we are already beginning to step out of the partisan spiral that is consuming us.

My prayer is that we will, by God's grace, model this in our corner of the world.

Yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the name 'Kevin' written in a cursive style.