

Genesis 11:1-9

¹Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. ²And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. ³And they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.” And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. ⁴Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.”

⁵The Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. ⁶And the Lord said, “Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. ⁷Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another’s speech.” ⁸So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. ⁹Therefore it was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth; and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

“Glorious Diversity”

Every profession has it’s humorous, and/or eye-rolling stories. There was one particular FICTIONAL story that was passed around when I was a District Superintendent that was a real eye-roller, but revealed some sad truths.

You see, a certain small United Methodist Church had a pastor who was retiring, so they were due for an appointment of a new pastor. The Superintendent, following procedure, asked the Staff Parish Relations Committee in that church to complete a church profile and questionnaire related to what they were looking for in a new pastor. Well, the Committee was having a hard time getting together, so the Church Council chair said that he did not mind filling out the paperwork on behalf of the congregation.

He completed the forms, listing all of the traits, characteristics, experience, and ministry practices that he thought would best serve the congregation. In his humble opinion, the church would thrive under the leadership of an experienced middle-aged male pastor (of course, with a wife who teaches Sunday School and three teenagers who make friends quickly and will bring youth into the church), a pastor who is always willing to give up his day off at least twice a month for the sake of having meetings, and a pastor who would learn the names of most of the folks within the community in the first two weeks, take folks on 4-5 mission trips each year, and preach a scholarly, biblical sermon on two texts each week, complete that sermon in 12 minutes, and have all the same values as this chairperson.

On the appointed day, the Superintendent introduced the new pastor to the Committee -- a single woman who had just graduated from seminary and had some disabling conditions that precluded extensive travel.

The Council Chairperson was livid. He looked for every opportunity to point out deficiencies in the pastor's ministry, even if they were minute. He publicly disagreed with the pastor frequently, and was critical of every worship service. Finally the chairperson decided to invite the pastor out onto his boat, where they would be able to have a truly private conversation to try to iron out their differences. The pastor arrived at the dock on the breezy day. She had debated about bringing her jacket, but decided to leave it in the car. But after they had been out on the water for just a few minutes, the pastor started to shiver, and told the chairperson that she wanted to get her jacket from the car. He said he would take her back to the shore, but she said, “Don't bother.” And she climbed out of the boat and started walking on the water to the shore. And as she walked away on the surface of the water, the

chairperson muttered loudly, “I can’t believe they sent us a pastor who can’t even swim!”

There is a truth that no matter how amazing a person might be, if they don’t think like us, walk like us, look like us, talk like us, live like us, or (God forbid) worship like us, we are suspicious of the person’s motives, worth, and actions. The sad thing is that too often when we are around people who are not like us, we respond out of fear, and too often distance ourselves from those Christ would call our neighbors.

Look at creation! It is rich with diversity. Different types of flowers bloom in different climates. Different kinds of fish live in sea water than live in fresh water. Insects and birds have different adaptations to thrive with a variety of diets and nutritional needs. And humans, humans, the scriptures and science tell us, are each unique. We have different fingerprints, DNA, gifts, talents, skills, body shape, abilities, hair color, lifestyles, complexion, and the list could go on. But, no matter how amazing a person might be, if they don’t think like us or look like us, sound like us, or love like us, we get suspicious.

And so, fear has driven us, and humans down through history, to try to think alike, look alike, and even believe alike. And when we privilege dominant voices and when we limit differing perspectives and points of view, we lose the beauty of diversity as a gift from God. And we forego the pleasure of enjoying the diversity that God has created.

Yes, God created diversity! We heard today the story from Genesis of God addressing the pride and unbridled ambition of the people who were all alike. Some people counter that this is just a myth or legend to explain why people speak different languages. Well, that is a possibility. And we also have seen throughout

history, and even in our culture today, the many dangers in dealing with too much power being conferred upon a few. Pride, greed, and corruption of many kinds can become dominant in such a way that the majority of the human family will suffer needlessly. Diversification of power then enables a more equitable sharing of resources, gifts, and access to care.

During my third week as your pastor in 2017, we had Vacation Bible School. My friends, looking out over the children and families in this sanctuary was a BEAUTIFUL sight. Visually, there were persons of many races, and mixed races, and I got so excited. Those who gathered for that week were a true reflection of our neighborhood. As I engaged in conversation with many of the families, I was tickled to hear accents that caused me to pay closer attention to each voice and delight in our sharing. It was a microcosm of diversity that was indeed glorious!

As I struggled to have conversation with folks in the Swahili congregation that now worships downstairs on Sunday afternoons, I saw this congregation embrace the opportunity for extending hospitality to those who look and speak and worship differently. And now the Global Harvest Church also benefits from sharing this space.

Yes, coexisting with those different from us takes extra effort, trust, patience, learning about “the other,” and seeking God’s guidance. AND, the resultant learnings about “the other” can bring joy, global perspective, appreciation of different ways of loving, living, speaking, working, seeking safety and livelihood. I believe that embracing *glorious diversity* expands our understanding of GOD!

And, friends, many times, the children will lead us! Take a look!

Would you want to miss out on the beauty of God's richly diverse creation? I encourage us all to push away the fear and make room for the many ways God would like to delight us through *glorious diversity* in this sacred creation! Amen.