

Ephesians 4:1-7
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“World Communion Sunday”

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I imagine you have identified the theme I hope to unpack for World Communion Sunday. While there are differences among us; still, in the middle, we are very much the same.

The poem I shared with the children is actually part of the lyrics to a song and they continue like this. “God made souls, one, two, three, loved them all equally, souls need homes like bodies do, one got me and one got you. Some got castles, some got shacks. Some got dresses, some got slacks. Some got white, some got black. But the most important fact is... in the very middle, you’re a lot like me.

Royal blue, Army green. Rhinestone cowboy, disco queen. Hula skirts, Denim jeans... not so different as it seems; and... it helps me not to be afraid, knowing we’re so much the same. The road we take leads to the stars. We’re just driving different cars. In the very middle you’re a lot like me. A shining personality. The clothes and the skin are just a covering. In the very middle you’re a lot like me!”

Paul seems to be saying the same thing to us as he calls his followers to understand the fundamental oneness that we share. In these 7 short verses Paul uses the words, “one,” “unity,” and “bond,” at least 10 times.

Still we find ourselves a deeply divided people. We gather to worship in the midst of a horribly contentious election season. We see “BlackLivesMatter” signs popping in yards across the street from “We Back the Badge” signs. When you add to that the bickering that often goes on in churches it seems we Christians are not any better with “oneness” than those around us.

Paul wrote these words to Ephesus, a divided community much like ours. Ephesus was the most important city in western Asia Minor (now Turkey). It’s population was around 250,000. It had a harbor which at that time opened into the Cayster River, which emptied into the Aegean Sea. Because of this access Ephesus became an intersection for major trade routes and a center for commerce in the region. Religiously, Ephesus had become dominated by a pagan temple dedicated to the Roman goddess Diana. Diana was the goddess of chastity, virginity, the hunt, the moon, and the natural environment.

As this popular goddess was receiving great attention, Paul made Ephesus a center for evangelism for nearly 3 years. For a while the church in Ephesus flourished, but when it began to struggle Paul did as he was known to do, he wrote a letter to help strengthen the faithful and reclaim the power of God in Christ Jesus.

We have gods which tempt us, and Paul knows this. Here, in this 4th chapter Paul does something very creative. Just when we are ready for him to start preaching at us, filling us with should and should not’s, Paul turns the tables. The apostle inspires the Christians in Ephesus,

even in this time of struggle, to be the best version of themselves they can be. He says, “lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.”

Paul is calling us to shed our assumptions of one another and focus on the similarities which really are greater than our differences. Yesterday, a number of us from Emanuel joined in an ecumenical community service event, “Churches Caring Together.” There were over 100 people from different church backgrounds Roman Catholic, Episcopal, UCC, Methodist, and Lutheran, who gathered to share what we have in common, helping our neighbors. We painted, and cleaned a garage, and picked up a public park, and made cards for the homebound, and sorted food, and knitted prayer shawls, and more! And there was laughter, and fun, and a free meal at the end where there was even louder laughter and more fun. See the lyrics I shared earlier are true... In the very middle, you’re a lot like me.

By now you are aware today is the annual celebration of World communion. Christians around the world intentionally acknowledge how far and wide the actual reach of the body of Christ has become. There is an old African Proverb that sheds light into our Celebration this morning. Many of us grew up learning that the proof of human existence is, “I Think, therefore I am.” Rene Decartes, a French philosopher, mathematician and scientist is credited as recording this back in the 17th century. But I find myself drawn to an Old African Proverb, far older than Decartes, which puts a decidedly different spin, it says, “I am, because we are.” This proverb lifts up the vital web of life to which we all belong, and without which none of us would be alive. We discover how our interdependence and interconnectedness becomes essential to our very survival.

Teaching Tolerance is project of the Southern Poverty law Center, an outgrowth of Dr. King and the civil rights movement. The goal of Teaching Tolerance is to become a resource where educators who care about diversity, equity and justice can find news, suggestions, conversation and support.

On our guest bedroom wall at home we have a poster from the Teaching Tolerance project. It pictures a diverse group of boys and girls sitting around a table, working together to make a big, beautiful picture. Underneath this picture is a poem written by Amy Moore who was 16 years old at the time, a High School student in Bargersville, Indiana.

She writes, “He prayed- it wasn’t my religion. He ate- it wasn’t what I eat. He spoke-it wasn’t my language. He dressed- it wasn’t what I wore. He took my hand- it wasn’t the same color as mine. But when he laughed-it was how I laugh, and when he cried-it was how I cry.

As you take the bread this morning, and dip it into the wine or grape juice. Notice your hand, and the hands of those next to you. And ponder the 2.2 billion people, from every continent, nearly every nation, who will be taking the broken bread, drinking this poured out wine, and

becoming your brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ; and remember, In the VERY, VERY middle, you are a lot like me.

AMEN