

Sermon April 7th, 2019

God's Word Speaks to Us in So Many Different Ways

God's creation is so diverse. There are so many different landscapes, ecosystems, living species, non-living things, weather patterns, etc. God's creation is so diverse. And yet, I argue that us, humans, created in God's image are the most diverse part of God's creation.

We come from many different cultures, races, ideologies, methodologies, religious traditions and beliefs. We come in many different shapes and forms. Probably why we struggle to get along with each other. We often see things differently.

Problem solving for example is a practice that often magnifies the diversity between people. Usually, when we are faced with a problem that impacts someone or something we come together to try to solve the problem. We see this method practiced in many walks of life from our jobs to our community networks to our political offices to our churches to our families.

Unfortunately, problem solving can be a time-consuming practice as we come with different ideas on how to solve the problem. And of course, every person's idea in this scenario is the best way to solve the problem. So, we argue or sometimes fight until enough of us in the group agree with the person who did the most to convince the majority to try his or her idea.

How often when you are involved in problem solving do you feel like your possible solution is the one to try? Do you struggle to accept the notion that there is more than one way to solve a problem, and that this is okay?

Often times we end up trying several solutions before coming to one that actually solves the problem. Sometimes we come to the realization that two or three of the solutions we heard can be used to solve the current problem. We are diverse creatures.

And problem solving isn't the only practice we do where our diversity is magnified. Dialogue with people from different religions or political ideologies where we seek common ground to work together for the love of the world can be where we also notice the diversity that exists between us. Have you ever learned something about another person's faith or ideology that made you scratch your head?

With mobile phones and other technologies that make it easier for us to access news sources we see more and more diverse interpretations of current events that are happening around our world. Scroll down and read the comments section and you will see firsthand how diverse we interpret and are impacted by current events.

Have you ever been part of a book study or movie study? We can all read the same book with the same words and plot or watch the same movie with the same dramatic scenes in it, and come away with a totally different interpretation of what the author or screen writer was trying to convey. We can come away feeling impacted by this book or movie in very different ways too. Our history, our personalities, our ideologies all shape how we experience literature.

It is no different when we gather together to study the Bible. God's creation is diverse including God's words and the way we hear God's words. When we read the Bible and then get in a discussion with each other about a particular text we often come away with different interpretations of the text. We often feel impacted differently by the stories we hear. Again, our history, our personalities, our ideologies shape how we hear the stories in the Bible.

So, from these examples I believe there are two basic truths about our humanity. 1) God created us as diverse creatures, therefore, we see a multitude of meaning in our experience with one another, whether through problem solving, or dialogue, or literature, or anything else you can think of, and 2) we struggle to accept this diversity. We often fight leading to partisanship and division. We end up attracting to people who think or look similar to us. We long for a simpler life that isn't tied up in all the differences that seem to be keeping us apart.

And I agree. In some ways life would be simpler if there was only one meaning or one way to solve a problem. The church would be a much easier group of people to get along with if the words in the Bible only meant one thing that was very easy to interpret.

I agree. Life would be simpler. But, when we embrace the diversity we share with one another. When we take time to learn about each other. To learn from each other. When we build bridges so to live together in

harmony. I argue that our relationships, our lives are enriched with so much more meaning and purpose.

In our gospel Mary anoints Jesus, and I grew up believing that there was one meaning to this story. Mary is preparing Jesus for his burial. Well, when I was reading through the commentaries the other day preparing for today's sermon I was amazed at the different meanings that this story brings to our lives. Yes, Mary is preparing Jesus for his burial. But, this isn't all that people hear from John's version of this story. Mary chooses to anoint Jesus' feet instead of his head as a foretelling of the foot washing that Jesus will perform on each of his disciples a chapter later in John. The foot washing that he invites us to do to others as a sign of Jesus' hospitality and love.

Also, some read this story as an exemplary story of gracious love and gratitude for all that Jesus has done for Mary and her family. Remember, just before this story in John is another story where Jesus raises Mary's brother from the dead.

So, this is a story that breathes more than one meaning into our hearts. And let's not forget the personal meanings you experienced when hearing this story from your particular lens.

So, knowing that more often than not we encounter more than one answer to a problem or interpretation. It is surprising that we seem to fight way too much about what is the right answer to a problem or interpretation. Instead of embracing the variety of meanings that exist in our world.

We even go so far to argue who has the best religion or who has the best culture or who is the best race or gender. With all the diversity that surrounds us I'm shocked when I see us fight against this diversity.

Maybe simple is easier and so more attractive. But is this the world God created for us? Is this the life God wants for us? One where everyone and every thought is the same. One where we live in our segregated groups. How deep can we dive into understanding our relationship with God and with one another if we don't explore and embrace the diversity that exists?

I believe God created a world that is diverse and full of mystery so that we invest time and energy into getting to know our world better. So, we can

take more time to understand God and our relationship to God. So, we can build deeper connections with one another.

When we find a world, our Creator, and each other filled with a multitude of meanings and embrace our diversity then we see a magnificent master piece being painted filled with a variety of interpretations and stories that move our souls to connect with our Creator and one another, generation after generation.

The word of God draws us to critically think about our relationships. The word of God calls us into a dialogue that leads us into the multitude of meanings that breathe life into us.

Today we reflect on Mary's anointing of Jesus. Today we are touched by the sadness that will come with his death. Today we are comforted by his invitation to be washed and to wash one another's feet. Today we are thankful for all Jesus does through the word to give us life.

Let us pray, loving God, we give thanks that you have embraced us with diversity. May we dive into your word embracing this diversity, hearing your story speak to us in many meaningful ways. And may these multitude of meanings bring us closer together. **Amen.**