

Fear not! Multiplicity is Spirit Activated

Psalm 36 and 1 Corinthians 12: 1-11

“There is a variety of gifts, but the same Spirit.” When we read from Paul today, you may not know what a difference these teachings of Jesus’ made to Paul’s life. So, let us remind ourselves a little bit about what Paul was like before he wrote this letter. Paul had not been living the life of an ordinary Jewish man. He had been living in the elite, the religious elite, and by elite I don’t mean “well” educated I mean “differently” educated. He had been taught the letter of the law and he had been taught not only how to keep the letter of the Jewish law, but how to look upon others who did not. He had been taught to look down his nose at those who did not know the law and arrest those who broke it. Everything for him was this or that: lawful or unlawful; clean or dirty. Paul literally arrested followers of Jesus because they were getting together anywhere with anyone and not only were they then eating together, but then they would talk to each other and say, ‘do you know that God made you? Do you know that God calls you to love everyone?’ They were saying these things **out loud**.

Soon Paul was literally blinded by Jesus. Not all of us need to be blinded to learn, but most of us need to be *blindsided* to be learning. It is difficult to learn, especially something so strange, like that God doesn’t check your credentials at the door; God isn’t checking your anatomy or your eye colour or even your height. God adores you, period. And suddenly, Paul realized that he was not prisoner **or** free, but both; he was not Greek **or** Jew, but both and he realized that he needed to trust that the Spirit of God was in everyone. And blindsided, jarring, unexpected, these are also what happens to us when we receive news that things are not this **or** that.

There is a sense of comfort in the binary. Binary is the fancy term for, ‘let’s put everything into one of two categories and then we will comfortably know where everything is, where everyone is.’ We will know how to behave and how not to behave. For example, you will be taught how to approach and interact with someone who is richer than you. You will act certain ways with someone who is poorer than you. Upon approaching someone you will be taught to look for different cues as to whether they are male or female which will tell you how to appropriately interact with them. Now, wouldn’t it be great if I could even tell you that the ‘good ol’ days’ only had this **or** that. But even in ‘the good ol’ days’ there was never only that and this. It’s just now more and more each day, more and more people are acting like themselves; they are looking like themselves.

The difficulty is even skin colour is never just one or another. In science fiction, a particular alien race calls human beings pink skins. But as you know, skin colour's never just one or the other, even among those people we call white, as you know, there are different shades of pink. There's that green colour they turn when they're nauseous, that red colour they turn when they are angry.

So, *if* I don't know what colour their skin is or whether they are male or female, I get uncomfortable. And I don't get uncomfortable because I am a bad person. I get uncomfortable because I have been taught, by my loving and caring parents, how to interact with people according to these categories/boxes. And comfort always feels better than discomfort or uncomfortable. And that's why binary is so attractive. I'll find my box and you find your box and we'll know how to interact because, of course, boxes come with instruction manuals, unlike humans.

When we are most uncomfortable, we also do another thing. We reach for people to tell us about the boxes. The fact is that binary is an idol. And as Paul says, idols don't speak, they don't think. All they do is add comfort in a world that is uncomfortable. Idols are not alive. If you know a little bit about the Hebrew scriptures, you know the most famous of idols was created the day Moses came down and said God wants us to behave. Immediately, the humans, went running for an idol because if humans are going to behave then we are going to fight about how we are supposed to behave. That will make us uncomfortable. It would just be much easier if everything is either this or that.

Idols also don't learn, they aren't alive, they don't speak, they don't change. An idol can't be changed by new knowledge. The golden calf would not have responded well to the world being found to be spherical rather than flat. Idols are not scientific. They don't go out with a theory and try and experiment a whole bunch of different ways to find out the myriad of answers in the world. Idols are not full of the Spirit, they can not surprise us, and they are not full of the gospel; the good news that Jesus was sent for all by God who made all and throws the Spirit into all.

Oh, but idols are so comforting, seductive, it just plain feels good if everything is in its category and I am saying this as the woman who organized the church office this week. The tape is no longer on the shelf with the staples. It is so comforting. But I have to remember that if it wasn't for tape and for staples things wouldn't get attached and sometimes you need tape and sometimes you need staples. Ok I will stop on the metaphor of office supplies.

Gender expression is one of those things that humans have always, every culture, wanted to put into boxes. Now some cultures have two boxes, some have three, some have four, but we definitely want boxes. Again, we are attracted to a world where I know how I am expected to behave. I know what polite is and what is kind. It also allows me to know who you are; whether you are that person or not I can just plop you into that box.

But as we are learning there are more people who are gender varied than there are people who are gender unvaried. Just like there are more people in the world who do not speak English than

there are people who speak English; anyone who has been bullied for being just too much of the wrong, knows that we guide ourselves by strange, rigid rules.

When I grew up on every fourteenth day or so I would act like a tomboy. I learned that tomboy wasn't a good thing, but it wasn't really a bad thing. One of my best friends was named Jason and on every fourteenth day, Jason would compassionately take care of whoever was crying on the playground. He was not called a tomboy. He was called a word that I will not say from this pulpit, but it was a word to let him know that if he acted in the way that *women* are supposed to act, he was doing something wrong. Well, how strange, I thought. I can vary my clothes a little bit and Jason can't; I can love and hug someone on the playground who is crying, and he is not supposed to?

When we are in safe places (as we always hope Robertson-Wesley will be) we can seek variety in one another. We can seek out and ask each other questions. My nephew was taught in kindergarten that when he wasn't sure, just ask what pronoun they would like you to use today. What pronoun? I didn't even know what pronouns were until grade 6, when my English teacher tried to teach me. He was taught to ask them their name and use their name.

The other wisdom I have been learning this month is that for those of us who feel more comfortable in the binary, it will often be an emotional response in your body when someone bumps you out of that binary. They may do that by telling you that you are not acting your age or your stage. Or they may do that by saying, 'Hi, my name is Joe and I go by they or them.' You are allowed to respond, but we try and create communities where you can go away and respond and react and ask questions in safe places so you can then return and engage with the person and say, 'Hi. I was in a box and I had to just go away and get out of my box. Thanks for sharing your pronoun choices, I go by (pronouns you identify with).'

It is okay to be uncomfortable. It's not okay to find comfort by ensuring others are uncomfortable. The pain of tripping over my tongue is so much less painful than the pain of someone being told not to be exactly who God made them to be. And so, I shall be tongue tripping along this journey with you, and we shall discover together how much we don't know - together. We are one body, full of a variety of gifts. Thanks be to God! Amen.