

For my graduate education, I was blessed to attend two seminaries: Reformed Theological Seminary and Princeton. They were both similar and different. Both schools taught the Christian faith from the Presbyterian heritage. Both were intellectually rigorous and held the scriptures in high regard. But at RTS, all of the faculty were white males. Now, I don't have anything against white men. They've taught me a lot. I happen to be one myself, but the diverse faculty and students at Princeton gave me a richer, nuanced, and more inclusive education. It was also more challenging and at times confusing. That's what diversity does. It can both confuse and enriches our lives.

So, here's my question for you: is diversity merely a faddish talking point, imposed on us by a woke elite, or is diversity at the heart of what God is doing in our world? We live in a time where diversity is often uplifted as an important value, and yet in a world of so many different perspectives, it's also fair to ask, what will hold us together? In the past, it's been things like national identity. *E pluribus unam*—out of many, we are one, yet our shared sense of national identity has been fraying for decades. And that's true of other things that might unify us be they geographical, gender, class or religious considerations. It seems like everything is fragmenting. What can hold us together now? On Pentecost, we witness the Holy Spirit as the source of diversity that connects all things.

Our reading from Acts 2 begins with the first followers of Jesus gathered in one place. It was a group of about 120 people, including the apostles, Jesus' mother Mary, and we can assume the other women disciples of Jesus as well. Suddenly a fierce wind from heaven fills the house and small tongues of fire appear over their heads. They are filled with the Holy Spirit and begin speaking in other languages. It's a strange story, perhaps even a little embarrassing. If I were writing a story about the power of the Holy Spirit, I wouldn't write this. What is going on here?

Last week we heard Jesus' prayer that we would be one. He prayed to God, "Just as you are in me and I am in you. I pray that they also will be in us." The intimacy that Jesus has with God the Father is the same intimacy that we are to have with God and subsequently with one another. How can that possibly be? How can you and I know the tender love that Jesus knew with the Father? Think of Jesus' baptism, where the heavens opened, and the Holy Spirit descended like a dove, and the voice of God saying, "This is my son, whom I love, in whom I am well pleased." That tenderness, that closeness is what Jesus wants us to have with God as well. The way we will know this kind of intimate connection is not by praying hard, or being good, or by believing the right things. The way we will know God as Jesus does is by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Next week is Trinity Sunday, and I will be gone, so I won't preach to you about this central, mysterious, and poorly understood doctrine of the Christian faith. The Trinity is not a bad math problem, nor is it an embarrassment. The Trinity is the way the church has articulated the central mystery about who God is. The God revealed in Jesus Christ is a God of loving relationship. Love is not something God does, rather God is love itself. If God is love itself, then that means God must be in relationship, because there is no love without a relationship. And what the Trinity says is that loving relationship is who God has always been. The cosmos emerges from the abundance of love that is the divine life. The Trinity teaches that God is the relationship of love between Father and Son, and the Holy Spirit is the flow of that love toward all things. Prodigal means abundantly lavish, and the prodigal Spirit shares the love between

Father and Son with all creation. The Spirit ensures that God's love is not self-enclosed but always moving outward, spilling over into the cosmos, sweeping all creation into the divine embrace.

Wrapping our minds around the Trinity is challenging and even confusing. But Trinity isn't something we understand as much as it enables us to understand both God and ourselves. Trinity means that God's own life is one of unity and diversity. Both are equally fundamental to who God is. Because God is triune that means unity does not finally consume diversity, nor does diversity destroy unity. They are held together in a relationship of loving mutuality that is at the heart of all things. Jesus promised his disciples that he would send the Holy Spirit that we might be wrapped up in the divine embrace and be conduits of that love to all people, which is exactly what we see on Pentecost.

When the Spirit fills the disciples, words of divine love spill out of them to the crowd gathered in Jerusalem. Jews in the first century were a diverse people of different languages and cultures from all over the known world, yet when all these different people heard the disciples, they heard them in their own native language. That's key. The Spirit didn't give the disciples a universal language that everyone could understand. No, the Spirit enabled the disciples to speak in such a way that everyone heard God's love in their own unique language. Why? Because the Spirit honors differences. Diversity for the Triune God is not something that needs to be overcome but is instead held in a relationship of mutual love and respect.

The paradox of the Holy Spirit is that she is both the great source of diversity in creation and the connector of all things. All the various forms of life and creativity have their source in the Prodigal Spirit. The 900 thousand known species of insects, the panoply of species in the ocean, 91% of which have never been classified, and of course the rich variety of human experience and culture—all this diversity is the delight of the Holy Spirit. That diversity is breathtaking and can be overwhelming. In our world today, diversity threatens to tear us apart. What holds us together if nation, class, geography, gender, or religion doesn't? For the Christian, it's the Spirit of divine love that flows through all things, both honoring differences and holding them in one great embrace.

When the crowd thinks the disciples are drunk, Peter quotes from the prophet Joel who spoke of a day when God would pour out the Spirit on all people, men and women, old and young, rich and poor and everything between. Pentecost is the inauguration of the prodigal Spirit being poured out on all people. This means we need not be threatened by our differences but can honor them, as God does, for God is both unity and diversity. For too long, the church has taught that to be saved is to become like us—however we define us. But the fiery Spirit of God is poured out on all people, young and old, male and female, gay and straight, such that we discover ourselves to be loved exactly as we are in all our glorious particularity. To know that is what it means to be saved.

Diversity is not a fad. It's at the heart of God who is both unity and difference, held together in love. But let's not kid ourselves, diversity is a challenge, isn't it? Life and faith are simpler when we're all basically the same, but that's not how God made us. The Prodigal Spirit made us different and blesses those differences. Maturity comes when we see and honor those differences. In our time, the old markers that held us together are fragmenting, and that can be confusing. If you're confused, then consider that you may be exactly where God wants you to be. Because what holds us together now is the Spirit of love. Trinity isn't something we

understand as much as it enables us to understand both God and ourselves. Just like God, we belong to one another, without consuming one another. You get to remain you, and I get to remain me in all my indivisibility and uniqueness. And what holds us together is not national identity, age, gender, class, sexuality, geography, not even our religion. What holds us together is the Spirit of love poured out on you and me and all creation.

On that first Pentecost, everyone heard the good news in their own language. So let me take a crack at doing that for you. In this month of Pride, you don't need to change to be loved by God, because you belong already. You don't need to learn a new language or codeswitch. You came into this world with the pre-existing condition of being cherished by the God who made you in all your uniqueness. It's good to be you. And if the church or anyone else has told you that you need to be something other than you to be acceptable, then I am sorry, because you are exactly what God had in mind when God made you.