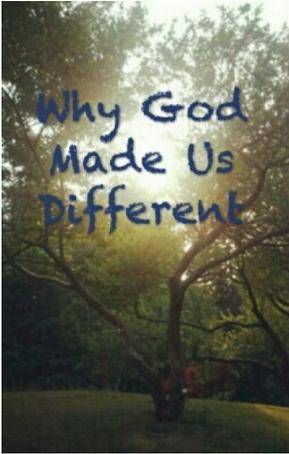


Pentecost Sunday, 2016– off-Lectionary
“Why God Made Us Different” (Colton Spence’s idea)

Texts: Acts 2:1-21
Romans 12:4-18

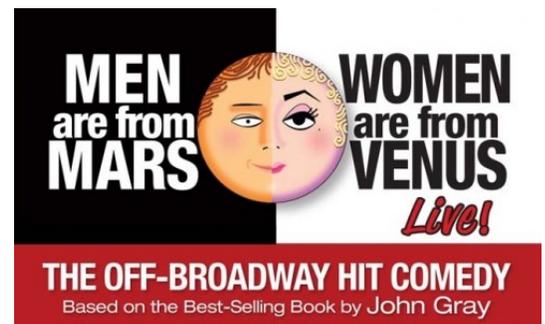
Preached: 5/15/16



This morning we continue with sermon ideas from the Confirmation Class. Our subject today was suggested by Colton Spence. Why did God make us so different?

This is a pertinent question for today. God made us different, graced us with a variety of gifts, from the very beginning when God’s Spirit hovered over the face of the waters and created such a rich tapestry...male and female, God made us.

There was a popular book a while back which highlighted the differences between men and women. It was even made into a stage performance – an off-Broadway play...if you didn’t see it...it was a comedy!...positing that “Men are from Mars, Women from Venus.



Our differences can be confounding...and not just between men and women. This fact of our differences...

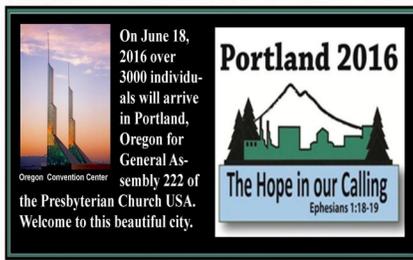
Doesn’t it complicate things for us...create divisions between us? Wouldn’t it be easier if we were all alike, shared the same tastes? Wouldn’t it be easier to get along? The people of the world have different languages, different customs.



This was very much display on that first Pentecost, as pilgrims from all over flocked to the great city of Jerusalem. We might not know the geography, but the description of diversity from the Book of Acts startles the ears:

⁹Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, ¹⁰Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, ¹¹Cretans and Arabs

All of these different folks, from different regions, converged on the holy city and there was bound to be confusion.



Next month I am one of Pittsburgh Presbytery's delegates to our denomination's General Assembly, meeting in Portland, OR. I've been receiving articles, documents, and instructions for months. Yesterday I received in the mail a Workbook titled "*Race and Reconciliation*." The introduction to the workbook states that Presbyterians are called at this time to "stand against the racism that is very much alive among us, in our nation, and in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.)"

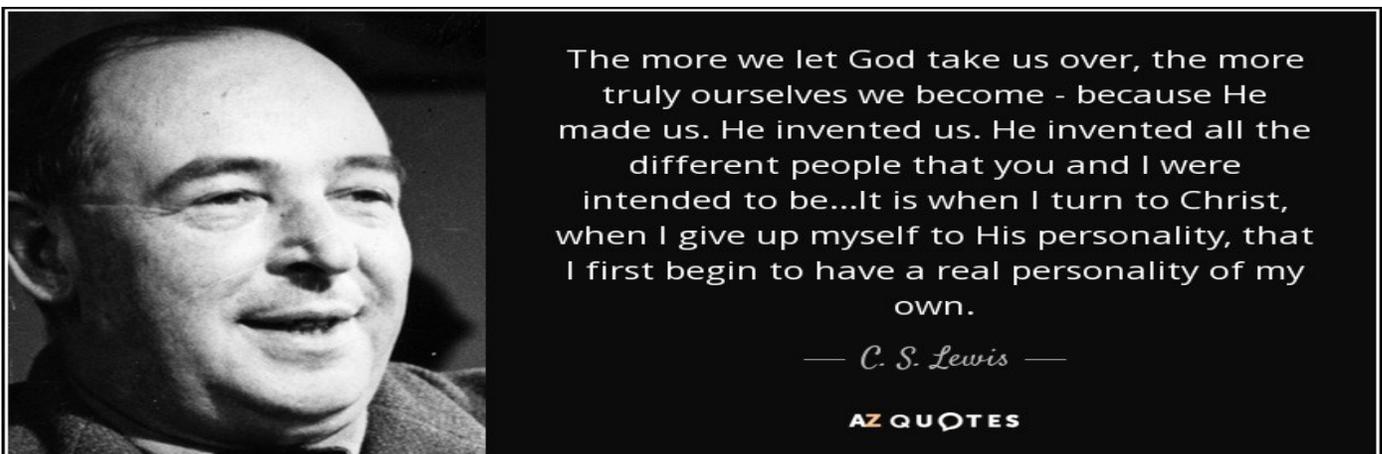
Presbyterian leaders know we cannot ignore the great differences, injustices even, between particularly Blacks and Whites. One document this General Assembly will consider is whether to officially ratify a new faith statement to be included in our Presbyterian Book of Confessions. It's called the Belhar Confession and was written in South Africa as a Christian response to the then official policy of Apartheid.



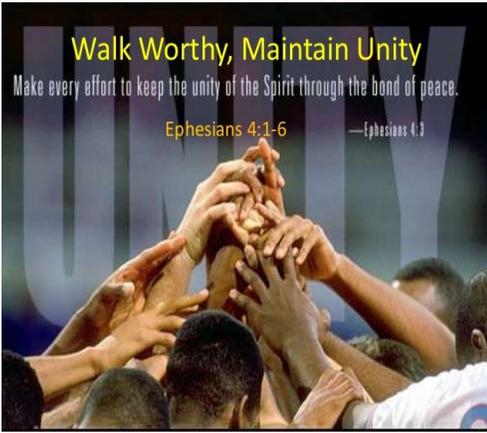
The workbook I will be reading states:

"We hope this study will enable you to claim the ministry of reconciliation in a world and church deeply divided by race, nation, gender, economic status, and religion."

God made us different, but our differences need not lead us to conflict. In fact, as we listen for God's Spirit together, we all hear the same message. Our troubles come when we ignore God and try to make the world into our own image.



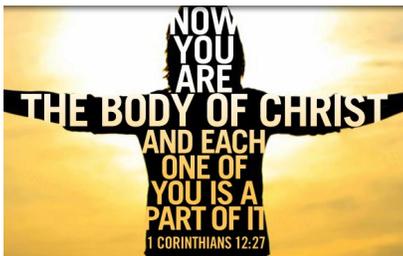
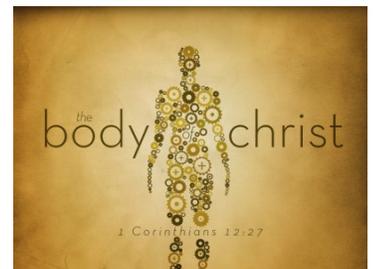
The Christian apologist C.S. Lewis said, "The more we let God take us over, the more truly ourselves we become -- because he made us. He invented us. He invented all the different people that you and I were intended to be...It is when I turn to Christ, when I give up myself to His personality, that I first begin to have a real personality of my own.



The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Ephesians, begged them to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called,
²with all humility and gentleness,
 with patience, bearing with one another in love,
³making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
⁴There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling,
⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism,
⁶one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.
⁷But each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ's gift....

God is the giver of gifts...has been from the beginning. But we're not all the same...can't be, really.

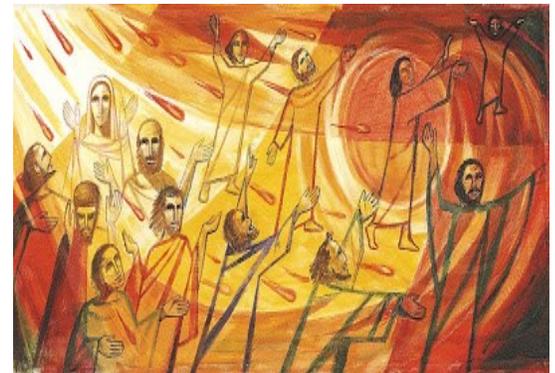
We, who are many and diverse, with different gifts and talents, make up one body in Christ. The Apostle talks about it over and over in his letters. To the Romans: *For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.*



And to the Corinthians: *Each one has a part.*

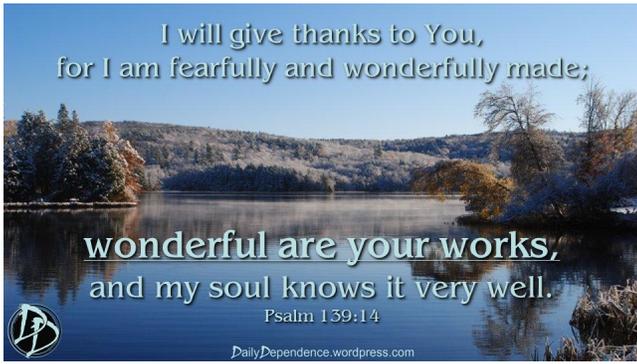
There was no way there could be unity in that crowd at the first Pentecost...no way the diversity of language and culture could be overcome...no way the Gospel could be shared among such a mixed group...no way each one could be a part of God's plan...no way that conflagration could be tamed or harnessed...no way... APART FROM GOD'S SPIRIT!

The faithful were gathered in one place – waiting, praying, as the LORD himself had instructed them to do. And suddenly... from heaven...there came a sound...like the rush of a mighty wind...All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and they began to speak, the gathered disciples did, ...and at this sound the crowd gathered, the diverse crowd... and they were bewildered – because each one heard them speaking in their own native tongue! They heard God speaking through those disciples, *I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh...everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved.*



God made all of us – poured out the Spirit upon each and every one of us – each one of us different than the other, unique and precious in God's sight, with an important contribution, a vital task, a special gift to share.

I love this day of Pentecost, with its rich imagery and abundant metaphor. There is the sound...like a mighty wind...tongues of fire...gathered disciples caught up in the Spirit...the church set ablaze.



And there is the underlying affirmation, always, that you are accepted and important, for God, himself, made you and called you and has a purpose for you and gifted you as such. You, me, we are fearfully and wonderfully made! Yes, we have our differences, different gifts, but the same giver.

remain captivated by the possibilities. I hope you are captivated, too...for the world, for East Union Church, for yourself, personally. If we could only listen for that sound – the wind, the mighty, rushing wind of the Spirit. Imagine what we could accomplish with God and for God, if we used our varied gifts together... Imagine!

