

Wednesday, April 8

## Getting Rid of Labels

Pastor Hank French

*There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus (Galatians 3:28).*

If there is one thing you can say about American society, it is that we have all kinds of interesting people living here. Men and women, people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds, people of different cultural traditions and different faith traditions—we are a diverse community of people, expressing through our work and relationships the common values that drive our life together.

Within such a diverse society, community doesn't just happen. It takes desire and intentionality. We have to want it and we have to work for it. The problem is that we have so many labels—white, Black, Hispanic, Christian, Muslim, Jew, straight, gay, tall, short, fat, skinny, rich, poor, immigrant, Republican, Democrat, liberal, conservative, young, old, etc., etc.—labels that keep us from seeing that others are real people with real feelings, real hopes, dreams and fears, real failings perhaps, but real promise as well.

One of the most powerful scenes in Shakespeare's play *The Merchant of Venice* has to do with these labels that hide humanity. Shylock is a Jew and the label *Jew* prevents others from seeing that he is also a human being. Shylock rightly resists the labeling that robs him of his humanity:

"I am a Jew," he says. "Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands, organs, dimensions, senses, affections, passions? Fed with the same food, hurt with the same weapons, subject to the same diseases, healed by the same means, warmed and cooled by the same winter and summer as a Christian is? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die?"

Yes. Behind every label is a person who laughs, cries, dies. At First Lutheran we try to look beyond the labels and see the person.

Prayer: Holy God to whom all of us are beloved children, today let me see people and not labels and let people see me and not labels. Amen.