

Thursday, September 24, 2020

“The awesome wonder of diversity...”

- Pastor Hank French

Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power (Acts 2:9-11).

This text from the Book of Acts showcases an obvious truth—we live in a highly diverse world. All of the different languages, all of the different cultures and customs, all the different skin pigmentations—a remarkable range of human diversity that sadly all too often elicits fear rather than wonder.

And there are so many other forms of human diversity—diversity of body types, diversity of hairstyles, diversity of styles of clothing, diversity of genders, diversity of sexual orientations, diversity of religions, diversity of ages from youth to the middle-aged to senior citizens. These forms of diversity sometimes elicit approval—which is affirming—and sometimes disapproval—which can be hurtful in so many ways.

Human diversity is an objective reality and it should be welcomed and celebrated. But in the current political context, diversity is all too often seen in negative terms. We must resist that tendency. To turn again to Maya Angelou:

“It is time for the preachers, the rabbis, the priests and pundits, and the professors to believe in the awesome wonder of diversity so that they can teach those who follow them. It is time for parents to teach young people early on that in diversity there is beauty and there is strength. We all should know that diversity makes for a rich tapestry, and we must understand that all the threads of the tapestry are equal in value no matter their color, equal in importance no matter their texture.”

In my many years working in the global mission of the church, I visited some 35 countries on six of the seven continents (haven’t made Antarctica yet!). It has been a humbling experience that has opened me to that rich human tapestry that Maya Angelou writes about. It has been an experience that makes me wonder why we label people, put them in boxes and then turn away from them rather than befriend them and learn from them.

In spite of all the diversity, we are alike deep down in the heart of things. We all sometimes laugh and sometimes cry; we all have dreams and hopes; we all have things we fear and things we long for; we all have people we love and people who love us; we all have things we love to do which bring us and others joy; we all get sick or injured from time to time and need medical help; we all watch the seasons come and go and we all know that someday we will die. More importantly from a Christian point of view, we are all children of God, created in the image of God, bearing the divine spark of God’s Spirit within us. Isn’t it time to embrace diversity and learn everything we can about all that it means to be human?

Prayer: God who created all that is, today let me look for people who are different from me and learn from the differences. Amen.