

“One Love, One Heart”
Sermon by Lisa Crismore
July 31, 2022 - John Knox Presbyterian Church

Genesis 11:1-9

Now the whole world had the one language and the same words. ~And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, “Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.” And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then, they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.” The Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. And the Lord said, “Look, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do, nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. “Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so they will not understand one another’s speech.” So the Lord scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore it was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth, and from there the Lord scattered them abroad over the face of the earth.

How many of you have a fenced in backyard? I can be included in this group. This was a plus when we bought our home five years ago as it would help secure our dog, Lucy, who was blind. Even though our Lucy is gone, we now have spunky Hazel, who loves to guard the fence line letting every neighbor’s dog know that this is our property.

In our first book of the Bible, we find the story of the Tower of Babel. To give you a perspective of where it falls in the Genesis story, we have the story of Noah’s Ark and the flood, which goes from Genesis 5:32-10:1. Genesis 10 goes on to speak of the sons of Noah as we hear in the last verse, **Genesis 10:32, “These are the families of Noah’s sons, according to their genealogies, in their nations; and from these the nations spread abroad on the earth after the flood.”**

Knowing then that the flood has ended, it is no doubt that Noah’s sons and their descendants spoke one language and the same words. It appears that the city of Babel was the place that Noah’s son, Ham, and his descendants settled. This story could be any of the descendants as they wanted to claim their identity and find security with the flood behind them.

To mark their identity, they decide to make bricks and form a city with a tower that would stretch to the heavens. One must wonder if there was fear of this community scattering as they were contained in this city.

What is interesting is the Lord’s response to this project. God doesn’t cause destruction to the tower or bring down what has marked the boundaries of the city. No God creates diversity by giving the gift of different languages. God’s plan was not for everyone to be the same but different. Yes, it would cause confusion especially in the beginning.

This reminds me so much of the movie, Pleasantville. Who has seen the movie? Bud and his sister are transported to this show on the television. They are stuck and cannot figure out how to get back to their own lives. Until this happens, they try and fit in. In

Pleasantville, everything is black and white with absolutely no color! Everything is pleasant. Everything is the same. Until, it isn't! When Bud's sister starts stepping out beyond the norms of Pleasantville, everything starts changing and colors begin to appear. In the beginning there is confusion and chaos. But, people start liking the differences they start to see and experience. These differences open up new possibilities to the world around them.

It is interesting that this text from Genesis is found in the lectionary to use on Pentecost. I am not sure I have ever heard a sermon on the Tower of Babel and this is probably why. We almost always use Acts 2:1-21, which also speaks of the birth of the Spirit coming in the form of people speaking various languages. I believe the Spirit is what helps in the confusion and opens us up to new experiences, learning about our differences. The Spirit can create a bridge that connects us despite our diverse ways. Even in the Genesis story, once the gift of languages is given the building of the tower and boundaries stop.

What can we celebrate by our differences or having diversity in our community - in our world? I think very recently I witnessed the celebration of our diversity when we had a surprise birthday party for Mahmooda Pitamber. I saw many of you trying food which you may have never eaten before in your life and you liked it! I heard people saying, "Oh, make sure you try this! It is delicious!" That day, our Fellowship Hall was filled with different languages, colorful dresses from Pakistan and a beautiful rainbow of skin color!

It was one week ago yesterday that my husband and I returned from our trip to Germany and Italy. Our time was mostly spent visiting with our foreign exchange daughter, Rebekka and her family which was in Germany. We celebrated her wedding, which was glorious. I was blessed to have shared in officiating at the ceremony. Blessings to Rebekka and Matthias, they had their entire wedding service translated in German and English so everyone there felt included. In Rebekka's family, her parents are raising three foster children. Little Emily is seven. She did not care that we spoke English and she only spoke German. She would chatter on with us not giving a care that we couldn't understand her because she knew from our smiles and hugs that we cared very much for her and her family. One of my favorite nights with them was watching them getting ready to travel to the city where the wedding would take place. The large kitchen was a buzz as everyone was very meticulously wrapping their special gifts for the bride and groom. Kerstien, the mother, was ironing her dress and made a special trip to buy us all spaghetti ice cream, a German specialty! Our time in Germany was not only spent with Rebekka and her family but also meeting up with the Pekki family from Finland, whose mother, Anu, was a foreign exchange student thirty some years ago with my parents. Rebekka has connected with them through our family.

Then, we were onto Italy to meet up with our friends Shivi and Robi. Shivi was also a foreign exchange student of my parents. She originates from Peru but met her husband Robi, fell in love and moved to his beloved Italy. She knows Spanish, Italian and English. When she answers the phone, it is interesting to hear her switch languages depending on who has called her. In Italy, it is clearly a different culture from Germany. The language is so beautiful as it has its own rhythm.

What can we learn from our differences? It is clear it takes energy and openness to expect and learn from each other. **Out of diversity can come community.**

Death – I am not sure I remember a time, thankfully, at John Knox where we have had two deaths in one week. It is true that we will all die. We have that in common. The differences run the spectrum of how we die, where we die, when in our life we die, who is around when we die. All of this doesn't change the fact that we die. Then there is the diverse way we celebrate that person's life – cremation or burial or both. But, whatever the differences are, there is community of love and caring for the loss of another. I have witnessed this time and time again and this week is no exception! There may have been differences of opinions, differences in how a person led their life, or differences in what a person believed was right and wrong. **Beyond these differences family and friends are willing to come together and there is community of grace, love and caring! This is what the world can learn from us!**

In this series, Marcia McFee has linked the sermon topic to a song. Today's passage is the Bob Marley tune – One Love, One Heart.

One love, One heart Let's get together and feel all right
Hear the children crying (One Love) Hear the children crying (One Heart)
Sayin' give thanks and praise to the Lord and I will feel all right
Sayin' let's get together and feel all right
Let them all pass all their dirty remarks (One Love)
There is one question I'd really love to ask (One Heart)
Is there a place for the hopeless sinner Who has hurt all mankind just to save his own?
Believe me One Love, One Heart Let's get together and feel all right
As it was in the beginning (One Love) So shall it be in the end (One Heart)
Give thanks and praise to the Lord and I will feel all right
One more thing Let's get together to fight this Holy Armageddon (One Love)
So when the Man comes there will be no no doom (One Song)
Have pity on those whose chances grow thinner
There ain't no hiding place from the Father of Creation Sayin' One Love, One Heart
Let's get together and feel all right
I'm pleading to mankind (One Love) Oh Lord (One Heart)
Give thanks and praise to the Lord and I will feel all right
Let's get together and feel all right Amen!

Benediction

The flower question – What do you value about diversity?