

## **Diversity, Celebrate it Everyday**

(Reflection by Rev. Peggy McDonagh, September 20, 2020)

The Holy Mystery within me acknowledges the Holy Mystery within you. In this holy mystery, we are all accepted, all valued, and all loved.

In our time together this morning we have been recognizing and honoring the gift of diversity that is life. No one of us can live today unaware of the magnificent diversity of human and non-human life on earth. In the Hebrew story of creation, we see that God purposely created diversity. If God created all life in the image of God's self, then God is in diversity, God is diversity. God holds all created life in love, and we too must hold all life in love.

So, we acknowledge this day that all life, the cosmos and beyond, are part of God's good creation, fundamentally loved, valued, and blessed. That diversity is how creation expresses itself and therefore is fundamentally good and divinely blessed. If God resides in creation, then we recognize that diversity is how the incarnate God expresses God's self. This day we celebrate and give thanks for the gift of diversity and how it blesses us with God's benevolence and creativity.

Like many of you, I love to spend time in the natural world. I am always amazed by its diversity lived out in the wide variety of colors, textures, sizes, and shapes of insects, birds, flowers, trees, and animals. I also love to watch people while sitting on a bench outside or in the mall. I am delighted by the richness observed in the mixtures of colors, races, ethnicities, genders, smiles, sizes, shapes, languages, heights, clothing styles, ages, and so much more.

As I watch people, what I do not see is the multiplicity of gifts, professions, struggles, opinions, expertise, wisdom, insight, faith, and cultural practices. Diversity is the way of life on earth.

It is this richness of variety that makes life so fascinating, challenging, frustrating, and mesmerizing, and it is these remarkable variations that gives all of us opportunities to grow, learn, and flourish. We all benefit from being one part of a world that encourages diverse forms of self-expression, filling the planet with variety beyond imagination.

How remarkable that each flower differs from every other and that every human and nonhuman new-born has a unique cry – known only to its mother. Imagine if you will how skin colors are rich and varied, and that each curled eyelash is different from all others. Green, red, or blue have endless number of shades, and our ear picks up thousands of tones, timbres, and pitches. It is nearly impossible to comprehend fully the

number of species of plants, trees, and insects, nor how they adapt and evolve. Thousands of languages are spoken, and music, rhythms, and emotional expression differ within each culture. The unique beauty and awe of the world are due in large part to its diversity.

Mike Ghouse is a Muslim and a worldwide interfaith speaker and writer about pluralism, hope, and world peace. He writes, "God has intentionally created diversity; each one of us has a unique identity with our own thumbprint, eye print, DNA, and other uniqueness. If we can learn to respect and accept the God-given uniqueness of each one of us, then conflicts fade, and solutions emerge."

Winston Churchill said, "Diversity is the one true thing we all have in common... Celebrate it every day."

Why is it essential that we celebrate and honor diversity? Maya Angelou writes, "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 what their color." But this is not the reality we see in the world.

It seems to me that it is crucial to honor diversity because we live in a world where many people refuse to recognize its rich tapestry of exceptional beauty and importance. Instead, they see it through the lens of their fear, mistrust, and suspicion.

So, we must stand in solidarity with diversity because we live in a world where people's skepticism, judgment, and prejudice narrow their focus. They become self-righteous about their beliefs, opinions, and ideas that set them solidly for or against others, causing them to take sides and become closed-minded.

We uphold the goodness of diversity because, in this world, some people believe in the superiority of color, ethnicity, sexuality, and gender, drawing lines of division, creating boundaries, and establishing restrictions.

Finally, we must recognize that the benevolent and loving essence of God exists in all things and in all life in a world in which some people make God into their own image, seeing themselves as virtuous, righteous, and worthy only of God's love. People who uphold an 'us and them' ideology create systems of rewards and punishment and shaming and exclusion. This 'usness and themness' view justifies violence, hatred, and destruction of human life.

My friends, the power and largeness of these negative responses to diversity are overwhelming, destructive, and heartbreaking, causing such immense grief, sadness, separation, and dehumanization. As I continue to read *The Universal Christ*, Richard Rohr's reflections give me hope

because they assure me that God's love is never limited by the lines people draw, the boundaries they create, the divisions they cause, and the limits they set.

I know that these distorted, uncaring, and often destructive reactions to diversity that encourage separation and deep abuse, are not of God. "Separation," says Rohr, "exists only in our limited thinking that shows its limit in our destructive actions." God creates connection, not separation. No matter how deeply people believe that they are right in their assumptions of who is blessed, who is right, worthy, and deserving of God's love, God does not abide in such narrowness. The Prophet Isaiah said, "This is no God who makes distinctions, who allows the shame of the human heart to judge the worthiness of flesh and blood by the color of the skin or the thoughts one thinks in secret."

"God does not just love some people," says Rohr, "God has no favorites." God's love is not restricted by our bigotry and inability to accept and welcome the other in our hearts. "God love things by uniting them, not by excluding them." Only people exclude.

"There is nothing humans can do to increase or decrease the image of God," says Rohr, "it is absolute and unchanging. And it is not ours to decide who has it or does not have it, which has been most of the problem for the world up to now. God's image is a pure and total gift, given equally to all." God loves love "and because divine love is already and always in, all things, therefore, all diversity is created in love and is love. Diversity is blessed, sound, and beautiful, and no one or nothing can alter the wonder of it all.

Dr. Yvette Flunder, who spoke at the Chinook Winds conference this week, talked about how God's spirit will not be confined only to one vessel or package. Both Hebrew and Christian scripture suggest that God would not be confined in a temple, in an ark, in a tower, in a place, in a creed, or only in certain rituals.

Similarly, God's spirit will not be confined to one gender, sexual orientation, ability, color, race, ethnicity, or by the lines we draw and the boundaries we create. God's spirit moves in and through the varied packages of human life, and we are profoundly blessed with the richness of all these beautiful vessels.

In his book, *A New Christianity for a New World* John Spong writes, "There is such a rich diversity of human life. In God who is the Ground of Being, who manifested that gift of being, there is neither east nor west, tribe nor ethnicity, male nor female, gay nor straight, true believer nor heretic, Christian nor Jew, Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist. There is only a God-

filled humanity, wonderfully diverse, yearning to live, eager to love, daring to be, and wanting to journey in community into the wonder and mystery of the God who is Being itself."

So, my friends, we celebrate diversity and recognize it as a profound and beautiful expression of the variety of ways that God manifests God's self in the world. Writer and businessman Max de Pree said, "We need to give each other the space to grow, to be ourselves, to exercise our diversity. We need to give each other space so that we may both give and receive such beautiful things as ideas, openness, dignity, joy, healing, and inclusion."

We are called to stand in solidarity with diversity in the presence of love. Jesus said that love was the greatest commandment. It is love that makes us into new beings connected at the heart of one another. In this connection, there is no stranger, alien, outsider, outcast, or enemy. Love recognizes no distinctions, no boundaries, or barriers.

"For the planet and for all living beings to move forward," writes Rohr, "we can rely on nothing less than the inherent original goodness of a universally shared dignity." The survival of all creation depends on the preservation of diversity. Each unique manifestation relies on the contribution of the other to the whole.

This day we acknowledge that no one of us, and no single group of people like us, can stand alone. We need each other to dismantle the boundaries, walls, and lines of separation. As we live with each other, differences and all, "turning prejudice into acceptance, hate into love, divisiveness into wholeness, separation into trust, including rather than excluding," we preserve humanity and creation.

We hear the prophet's voice, "I have not spoken my word in hiding, I have spoken my word before all creation to bind you as one people living in my promise of justice, my dreaming of your peace."

In closing Unitarian minister Rev. Jean Rowe reminds us that we have a calling in this world, to honor diversity, respect difference with dignity, and challenge those who forbid it. "We are people of a wide path. Let us be wide in affection and go our way in peace." Amen.