

August 16 2020

Sermon - August 16: United in Diversity (Freed From: Conformity - Freed For: Creativity and Expression)

Scripture: Psalm 136:1-9 - Margie Bolte, Reader

1O give thanks to the Lord, for God is good, for God's steadfast love endures forever.2O give thanks to the God of gods, for God's steadfast love endures forever.3O give thanks to the Lord of lords, for God's steadfast love endures forever;4who alone does great wonders, for God's steadfast love endures forever;5who by understanding made the heavens, for God's steadfast love endures forever;6who spread out the earth on the waters, for God's steadfast love endures forever;7who made the great lights, for God's steadfast love endures forever;8the sun to rule over the day, for God's steadfast love endures forever;9the moon and stars to rule over the night, for God's steadfast love endures forever;

Romans 8:38-39 "38For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, 39nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Last week we talked about the freedom in which we are all created, and how this is the foundational ground of our relationship with God and with one another. We spoke of freedom in God's love being something that frees us from living up to a perceived expectation or striving for an imagined objective truth out there somewhere, and frees us for exploring, discovering, and using our own creativity to participate with God and each other in the continual unfolding of all that is.

This week we are exploring the wonderful and imaginative diversity of God's creative being. There are so many creations all moving and being together in the world, all at the same time. Plus, there is always something else coming in to being, not to mention tons of other beings already out there in the wider expanse of creation that we humans still have no idea about yet. Even if we just talk about one species, say flowers, there are so many different types and combinations out there, how can we ever think that we could capture everything that God is creating within the confines of the binary thinking we often find ourselves trapped within? God, creation, and our participation in creation, is so much bigger than anything we can narrow down into "either/or" kinds of language and conversation.

Within this understanding of God's diverse creativity, difference is not a problem, but rather, is the point, and somehow our human constructs within creation have turned this whole point inside out. Difference has become something that we fear and steer away from rather than celebrating. We have narrowed our language and our creativity down to what we believe to be manageable parts of the whole and denied ourselves the wonder of imagination and the joy of discovery.

Our world has become so small that we only seem to be able to think in terms of male or female, rich or poor, young or old, smart or not, abled or not, white or not, when in reality there is an entire spectrum of identities within creation. And, along with shutting down our worldview, we have also assigned judgment within this binary process: good/bad, right/wrong, light/dark, divine/evil. Limiting ourselves into binaries, we have pushed creation into only one direction of being, which we all then seek to conform to in one way or another. We raise up and support that which seems "right and important" and totally disregard, neglect, and seek to destroy that which does not.

Even the language of “diversity” itself sets up a hierarchy that may not be intended. Think about when you have heard the word...whoever it is that uses the term is setting themselves up as the “Standard or Norm” for the comparison, and therefore everything “other” from themselves is different, and often, not quite living up to the standard or the norm. Perhaps, then, a better way to describe the many and various creations of God is to turn back to our creation texts from scripture and capture the original intent of the multiplicity of species rather than analyzing the differences between them. In this way, we can see how God continually creates in multitudes of being, reinforcing the idea that there are many ways to be and live out your creation in the world, rather than conforming to just one “right” standard. Binary thinking separates all creation into sub categories of who’s in and who’s out, what is right versus what is wrong and limits us from our full participation with God.

Think of the damage that has been caused within this narrow-minded conformity: We have neglected and overrun our planet until it is literally gasping for air. We have neglected over half of the world’s population as they struggle for their lives in war-torn countries and then are forced from their homes to plead for mercy in new countries, some living in miles and miles of tent cities for more than 30+ years, while others risk their safety in overcrowded lifeboats crossing rough seas and walking great distances, only to be turned away at the borders. We are holding children in detention centers, killing and incarcerating marginalized people in the name of justice, and moving military into our streets to disperse peaceful dissent. Is this really what we want our futures together to look like?

Participating with God in the multiplicity of creation frees us from an “us versus them” worldview that closes us in and feeds into the fear that leads to separation and oppression. It frees us for seeing the world through God’s eyes: celebrating the many creations, helping to name and claim each unique creation, and calling them “good.” In this way of being, the more there is of creation, the better. We are freed from the conformity of standardization, and freed for living within the full spectrum of being. As God’s children, we are called to explore and discover what each brings to the whole of creation, learning from one another, and extending creation even further.

It is the common participation with God in the continual creation that unites us. This gift is not something to be limited or feared, but rather, to be celebrated, together. Each one of us reflects the Divine. We ARE the creativity of God in the world – each of us is a piece of God’s own self. Let us live in celebration of this awareness, looking to each other for another piece of the divine, that continually frees us to live a life of love, for one another and all that is. Amen.