

“Impedance Matching”

Sermon – February 4, 2024 Stone Presbyterian Church

Impedance. It comes from the word impede, which means to hinder or obstruct. What is impedance then in simple words?

Impedance is an expression of the opposition that an electronic component, circuit, or system offers to alternating and/or direct electric current.

Impedance is a two-dimensional vector quantity consisting of two independent scalar (one-dimensional) phenomena: resistance and reactance.

The resistance component arises from collisions of the current-carrying charged particles with the internal structure of the conductor.

The reactance component is an additional opposition to the movement of electric charge that arises from the changing magnetic and electric fields in circuits carrying alternating current.

Impedance reduces to resistance in circuits carrying steady direct current.

Are we good so far? OK, then.

The term “impedance matching” then is rather straightforward.

We can define impedance matching as the process where the input impedance and the output impedance of a given electrical load are designed to reduce signal reflection and maximize the power transferred to the electric load.

Basically, if the impedance is not matched between the source and the load, you give waves of energy reflecting back, so it's both not getting through to where you want it but it's also coming back and can be disruptive to the system. *<slide>*

You see this in practice with our sound system. To get the maximum power to the speakers the designers put in components that match the

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impedance of the amplifier to the speakers. Otherwise, much of the energy gets reflected back, which is not a good for the amplifier.

I think clearly now you can see why I picked this for my sermon title, right?

Because, unless you are an electrical engineer, you are thinking, “I have no idea what he just said; I might as well have been listening to a teacher speak in a “Peanuts” animation—“wah, wah, wah, wah.”

And that is the point. When I read the lectionary passages, particularly Paul’s message in the epistle lesson, impedance matching is what came to my mind because 40 years ago when I did real electrical engineering work for a few years, I experienced this phenomenon. Therefore, that analogy spoke to me and I could visualize it in my mind’s eye.

The irony is that with most of you it was impedance mismatching. That is, most of the “energy”, if you will, got reflected back on me and very little got transferred to you, other than perhaps irritation.

Another, and more accessible, title would have been “Be Attuned to People.” Then I could have used the example that if you strike a tuning fork, like musicians use, it will make another tuning fork nearby also vibrate—but only if it is at the same frequency. They have to be on the same wavelength for the energy to transfer.

But I only thought about that one last night.

This is what Paul means, essentially, in verse 22 in today’s lesson from 1 Corinthians 9 when he says, “I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some.” Paul is proclaiming his message of Jesus the Christ, but he speaks in the language and lingo of the people he is trying to reach.

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Paul adapts himself to each context because the gospel is never one-size-fits-all. Contextuality is not to bend the gospel to fit different cultures but to respect diversity among all of God’s creation.

For Jews he cites scripture. For Greeks he uses Greek philosophy against them. To Romans he compares human kings to the king of kings. This is not relativism or situational ethics. It’s speaking in the context of the other person so impediments are minimized and they get the maximum power of the message. Paul matches up with them.

At the same time, he tries no aggrandizement, no building up of himself. He wants nothing for himself, but to know that people have heard and accepted his message. That is his reward.

Paul argues that, first and foremost, proclaiming the good news means being less concerned about personal privileges and rewards and more focused on the call.

Jesus is similar. This is the third week of Mark for the gospel lesson and we are still in chapter 1. After casting out a demon from a man in the synagogue in last week’s lesson today Jesus first heals Simon’s mother-in-law. It is almost a throwaway line in verse 31, “He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them.”

It was a private affair with only a few people present and with no dramatics or theatrics. Jesus sought no glory or recognition. There was no TikTok or Instagram posting nor would there have been if he had done it today.

Then at sundown, when the sabbath was over, people came all over to be healed, which he did. Because that’s what the people needed.

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The same is true for us today. If people are hungry, thirsty, or homeless, saying to them “Jesus saves” and walking away is not proclaiming the message and borderlines on being cruel.

Still, Jesus recognizes that simply being the hometown miracle healer is not enough. He has message to proclaim and needs to get out to give it. Paul does so also in his own way.

And while Jesus and Paul meet people where they are, neither backs down from speaking truth to power or defending the weak from the strong. They did not curry favor with those in power—in fact confronted them instead—but sought to help the powerless.

In their own ways, each was about inclusiveness, reaching out to those in need: physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Today we see people trying to push their version of Christianity that is counter to what Jesus did and taught. And many seek to profit off others becoming preachers who are multi-millionaires justifying that they have “earned” it and “deserve” it. Paul—and Jesus—would have some words to say about that.

And we mourn the divide in our country with groups in their own echo chambers with no engagement with “the other”; a complete mismatch.

Like the Jews returning from Babylon, we can wonder where this will all lead and even where is God in all this. But today’s Old Testament lesson from Isaiah 40 tells us that God is in charge—has been from the beginning.

And, yes, after all this time it can be hard to keep the faith.

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Because given the choice between a source of relief that is distant and slow acting but guaranteed and one that is nearby but ineffective, most persons may tend to choose the relief close at hand.

Today many are taking the quick-fix, sound-bite, self-justify approach to their lives and their faith. But like the grass that breaks through the cracks in cement, we do not give up. We continue to find ways reach people and to help them, knowing it may not be easy.

It can be tiring and so we follow the example of Jesus who went off to a quiet place to pray and mediate. To clear his head, recharge his batteries, and receive the guidance from God.

And we go forward patiently but determinedly with the message of God’s love in word and deed because “those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint.”

In the name of God the Creator, God the Redeemer, and God the Sustainer.
Amen.