

## **“Difference, Equality, and Integration”**

### **Sermon – May 24, 2026 Stone Presbyterian Church**

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Humans are funny creatures. We have these dynamic tensions between acting as individuals and acting in groups. Each inherently wants what’s best for them and yet we cannot survive without being part of a group. No one is an island.

And things become more complicated because there is more than one group. There’s family, friends; work associates, community, organizations, and the list goes on. And we are constantly navigating these relationships with varying degrees of familiarity or even rejection.

The inevitable part of that is mentally and emotionally deciding who is in your groups or not. Who is “us” and who is “them”. And then inevitably placing a judgment value on “them”, which can range from benign to hostile.

When I worked in the corporate world, we almost always had to work in teams, groups. And you did not always have choice of teammates or whether even to be on the team.

Over the years, particularly early in my career, I had a lot of management training, including team-building exercises. One of the lessons we were taught was valuing all the members of the team and for each member to contribute on solving the problem and achieving the goal.

Often, you had one person on the team who thought they knew it all and would drive their solution. Eventually, I—<cough, cough>“they”—learned the fallacy of that approach (though my wife might disagree).

What “they” learned was the value of different perspectives. And to have different perspectives, you needed people who were different from you. It could be ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic, age. You didn’t want a carbon copy of you.

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For organizations, one danger in teams is groupthink where the group makes poor decisions because they don't encourage or even allow encourage dissent and so everyone goes along for the ride.

A different way of saying it would be you want to foster diversity, recognizing and drawing upon a wide spectrum of human experiences.

Another part of that is equality. You want to give everyone an equal chance to participate. That might mean actively calling on the quieter members of the group and having the more active members be quieter.

But you also take a broader view realizing an “equal chance” may not fair because you acknowledge that people have different starting points and systemic disadvantages. So, you allocate resources and remove barriers to better ensure equal outcomes. You could call this promoting equity.

For a Baby Boomer it might mean giving them training on how to use generative artificial intelligence while for a Gen Z'er it might be coaching on public speaking and presenting to a live audience. But these are stereotype examples, which you also have to be on watch for.

Finally, you want to pull this all together. You want to have integration of the different and diverse ideas and the people who come from all walks of life that you've helped get up to where you need them to be.

A critical part of that integration is to create an environment and culture where any individual or group feels welcomed, respected, supported, and valued. This ensures that diverse perspectives are not just present, but actively integrated and empowered to participate in decision-making. You could call this “inclusion.”

While I have discussed this concept of Difference, Equality, and Integration or perhaps more descriptively put as Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, in

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terms of business and organizations, it also reflected in our scripture lessons today.

In today’s passage from Acts 2 that we hear every year you note that the Holy Spirit came upon all those first 120 followers of Jesus—men, women, old, young, rich, poor. The first act of God's Spirit at Pentecost honors the diversity and individuality of the believers.

This rush of a violent wind drew in other Jewish people who were living in Jerusalem, but were from other countries. And they are astounded to hear about God’s deeds of power in their own languages. God’s Spirit does not insist that people only hear the message one way, in one language; God speaks so that each can understand.

And after Peter’s speech (really a sermon), which we only heard the first part, 3000 people are baptized and join the Jesus movement.

Thus, the nascent church consists mainly of immigrants, people of different languages and cultures with different mother tongues but all united in Christ by the Spirit.

God's promise for the church is that in our diversity, through our diversity, the Spirit still leads us forward in understanding.

And, in fact, this story describes not the birth of the church as a physical entity, but rather the empowerment of the believers to bear witness to the ends of the earth, as Jesus promised just before his ascension.

And while we joyfully celebrate the coming of the Holy Spirit, the purpose of the day is not to congratulate each other but to repent and believe.

You might have noticed in Peter’s speech that although Joel declares that God will pour out God’s spirit on all flesh, the wealthy, the patriarchs, the able bodied, and the enslavers are not named. This is not to suggest that they are not included, but perhaps by tending to those who are chronically

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ignored and overlooked, the prophet highlights that those who think they are safe because of their wealth, gender, ability, or domination of others are the very ones who need new tongues to call on the name of God and be saved.

In the epistle passage from today, we hear about diversity of gifts and yet all are equal members and so the church must be inclusive of all who believe. In the First Church of Corinth, people have been arguing and bragging about their gifts, particularly those speaking in tongues.

Today’s passage underscores the Spirit’s purpose in giving gifts is to build up the church, not to exalt the recipient.

According to Paul, one way to know whether a movement is led by the Spirit of God is to listen for its claims about Jesus Christ.

Gifts from God's Spirit proclaim Jesus as Lord. They also serve the common good. Thus, if a gift cannot be shared, and shared for the good of others, it is not from the Spirit.

These gifts can and should be celebrated, but more importantly used for the building up of the kingdom because they are given by the spirit, not to create division but unity, for we are the community of God.

The Spirit's work is cohesive, uniting believers into “one body” comprising members that function interdependently.

The fullness of the Spirit's work is corporate, with the one Spirit manifested differently through different gifts with no partiality to those who believe.

The power of the Holy Spirit transcends differences, comes equally to all, and is inclusive of all. Let us pray that it may transform the hearts and minds for all proclaim “Jesus is Lord” that all might be united together into one body under God with love and justice for all.

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.