

Sermon Discussion Information

Sermon Series: Why We Gather, Grace-Filled Accountability

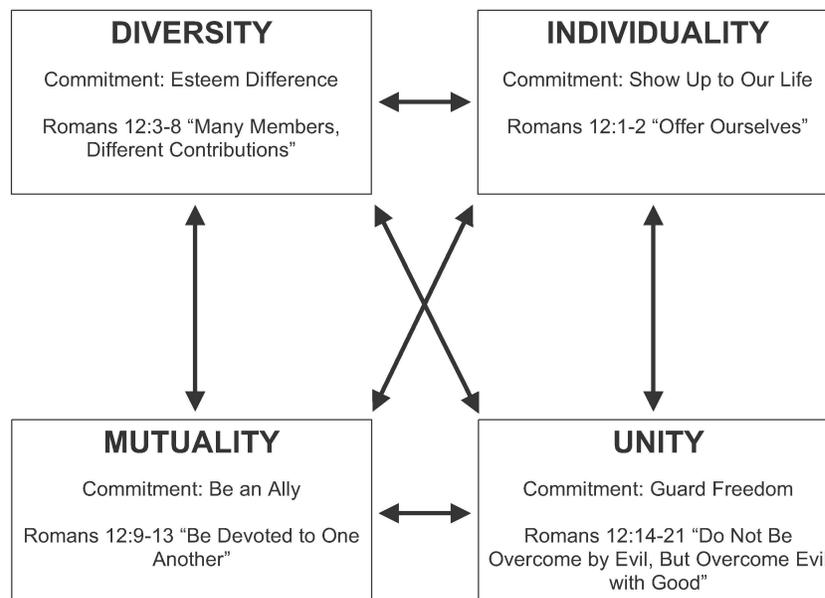
Sermon Title: "Diversity and Unity; Individuality and Mutuality" (Part One)

Sermon Text: Romans 12

Listener's Journey: I want my listener to develop a whole life ethic that resonates with the Creator's paradoxical framework of the entire cosmos: diversity and unity, individuality and mutuality.

Unique Quotes from Sermon:

This pivotally important teaching of Paul on Christian social conduct had special importance to the complex diversity perspectives of the Early Church in Rome, and has special importance for the 21st Century Church today. For Christ followers, amidst our socially fraught context and increasingly connected global reality, we are given explicitly practical teaching about how to navigate some of the most complex ideas that humans can consider to live a more enriched life, and holistic Christian faith. I will go so far as to say that what Paul has gifted us with in Romans chapter twelve is an invitation to a whole life ethic that resonates with the Creator's paradoxical framework of the entire cosmos: diversity and unity, individuality and mutuality. These two tensions and four constructs hold key points of wisdom for many of today's seemingly intractable conflicts. Today I will be talking about two of these four ideas. Take a look at the big picture of these ideas in relationship to one another as we work through them for this and the next sermon:



Diversity and Unity; Individuality and Mutuality. This chart constitutes two paradoxes held in tension, and four concepts meaningfully connected. As a reminder, the teachings of Jesus are central to Christian faith and tradition and Jesus' favorite method of teaching was through stories called "parables" and occasionally paradoxical statements (and this is the definition of a paradox) which seem contradictory but when held in tension express a truth. Those who are willing to wrestle with the tensions of Jesus'

paradoxes will find new ways to look at the world, live with greater wisdom in day to day life, and yes, find diversity to be a joyful pursuit of meaningful growth.

“Diversity” requires a commitment to esteeming difference. “Unity,” its paradox partner, can only be created and maintained if there is a commitment to guard freedom in Christ. “Individuality” is most authentic when we bring our whole selves to all of the spaces of our lives, including Christian community. And, finally, “Mutuality,” the paradox partner to individuality, makes the brave commitment to be an ally to one another across our different identities and to all realities of the cosmos. To hold one another accountable to these important and life giving paradoxes is to hold one another in the created order of things as designed by God.

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The concept of diversity can be controversial and seemingly complex in our time. Although, it shouldn't be. It really is a simple concept. To embrace diversity means that we respect and esteem the differences between us. Diversity only becomes controversial when a person or group doesn't want to do that. And, it needs to be said that respecting our differences is an important first step. *Esteeming* our differences is the secret sauce of life!

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Why do it? Why sit in the outrageous tension of diversity and unity? “To wait for God to heap burning coals on our enemies' head?” Some feel that Paul added that as an accommodation to our base nature so that we would give the goodness route a try. It does seem he overplayed his rhetoric because Jesus added nothing beyond “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you that you may be children of God.”¹

Jesus taught this because it is one key way to help us move in the rhythms of how the entire cosmos was designed to work, in that peacemaking and being the one who stops the cycle of violence keeps the door open for our enemy to understand our humanity and possibly remain connected and continue considering that which we believe is true even as we continue to sit with what it is that holds them in what they believe to be true. We are all accountable to God as revealed over the arc of time anyway, and the truth will be made known ultimately. If we can rest in that larger truth, our faith will be more generous, and our lived experience more empathic with one another.

Three Discussion Questions:

1. How do you understand the concept of “diversity?” “Unity”? (Personal sharing)
2. Today's text has many admonitions to Christ followers. Which stand out as most compelling to you? (Exploring the text)
3. What are some small and practical ways that you can hold diversity and unity in paradoxical tension? (Direct application)

¹ Matthew 5: 43-48.