

Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ

Sunday, September 29, 2019
Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost

“All Different and the Same?!”
The Reverend Dr. Scott Everett Couper

Hebrew Scripture: Genesis
Christian Scripture: Galatians 3:26-28



Some weeks ago, I shared with you that a colleague of mine, The Reverend Kurt Shaffert, minister at Bellows Falls (United Church of Christ), inspired our last sermon series on ‘Iconic Devotional Art’. Recall that, as a cartoonist, Kurt encouraged me and members of our churches to use art to better communicate the gospel of Jesus Christ. Well, at the clergy convocation I attend this past week in Burlington, the same Kurt brought with him a very little yellow Labrador puppy. Everybody loved this puppy! All present cooed and coddled this overly adorable puppy the entire weekend. Also, a couple in our church recently received a new puppy into their home. Their new puppy is not a yellow Labrador, but rather a black one. So, I wondered, what makes

yellow Labs yellow and what makes black ones black? I suppose all of you can guess; it has something to do with ‘genes’. If we were to ask Stephanie here to answer my question, she would bore us all to death by explaining that “a gene has two alleles, one from each parent, that are paired to create a genotype. This distinguishes a phenotype [...]. Two dominant alleles create a dominant trait as is the case with black Labs [...]. When two recessive alleles are paired” we get yellow Labs.¹ At this point, I would say, “Who cares! It’s the same animal, just different colors”. That’s why I love this meme:



I remember when my son and daughter, Micah (who is a White) and Madeline (who is a Black), first went to primary school together. Micah grew-up in a black township in South Africa. Micah was raised with his two white parents and his many black neighbors. Yet, until Micah attended school with his sister, he never really noticed race

¹ Stacy Venzel, “What Determines the Coat Colors of Labrador Retrievers? *Wide Open Pets*, (7 months), accessed on 30 September 2019, <https://www.wideopenpets.com/what-determines-the-coat-colors-of-labrador-retrievers/>.

before. One day at primary school, his classmates noticed that he and Madeline kept coming in the *same* car and were always dropped-off by the *same* two white parents. I once overheard one of Micah's age-mates confront Micah about this: "Why are you 'peach' and why is your sister 'brown'?" I saw a look of bewilderment on Micah's face. At that moment, that his little sister and he were different colors registered for the first time in his little mind. I decided not to 'save' him and let him field this question alone. "Well..." Micah thought, "...I like jelly, so I'm peach. And my sister likes peanut-butter, so she's brown". That was his answer! It was as good as any, as far as I'm concerned. It is certainly better than Stephanie's boring lecture about genes. In Micah's mind, while he and his sister were different, they were both the same.

Friends in Christ, this morning's message is *not* going to be about social justice or racism *per se*. I think you all are aware of the implications of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and thus my message this morning. Instead of advocacy, I hope my message this morning will be devotional, or inspirational, in nature. And perhaps this is as it always should be. I don't really believe we can genuinely persuade people by intellectual, scientific, political, or social argument to do the right things - sadly, not even in sermons.



And people really cannot be ‘guilted’ into loving others. To some extent, only the Spirit of God can persuade people’s hearts - and I believe this is done primarily (or only?) through relationships. Was it not the prophet Jeremiah who communicated the will of God when he said “No longer can the law be written on stone, but rather it shall be written on your hearts” (Ezekiel 36:26, Jeremiah 31:33, and Hebrews 8:10)?



So, this morning our two themes, “Embrace Diversity” and “Reject Racism” in our second of eight week sermon series “Be the Church”, seek to cultivate appreciation for the diversity present in God’s Creation. In short, you and I will never rid ourselves of racism, sexism, and homophobia if we have not cultivated **an appreciation of diversity**. Only ‘appreciation’ can lead to ‘value’. And only ‘value’ can lead to ‘celebration’. And only ‘celebration’ can lead to

‘preservation’. Conversely, ‘a lack of appreciation’ leads to ‘devaluation’, which leads to ‘denigration’, which leads to ‘stifling conformity and enforced uniformity’ (which the Christian faith has sadly fostered and enforced for hundreds, if not thousands, of years).

So, this morning let me close this short devotional with some fun animal facts that I pray cultivate an appreciation of the diversity that God intends in our world.



1. All clownfish are born male, and only will only change sex in order to become a (dominate) female. So, not only do many clownfish become transvestites, they are matriarchal, like elephants and bees.



2. (For you ‘lefties’ that sometimes have felt marginalized): All polar bears are ‘left-handed’, or ‘left-pawed’, as it were.

3. Bats always turn left when exiting a cave. Hmmm.
4. Just like zebras, no two tigers have the same stripes.



5. Butterflies taste with their feet.
6. Dolphins sleep with one half the brain at a time, and with one eye closed.

[Ag! That's nothing. Most of you do the same thing every week during
my sermons!]

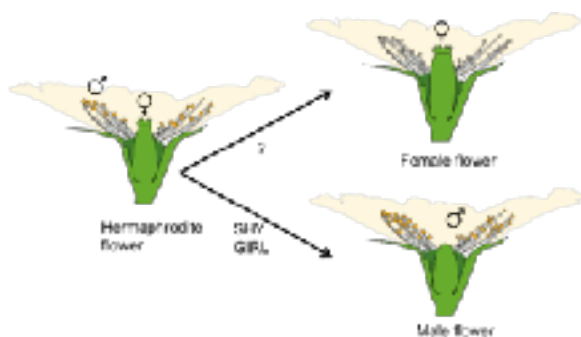


7. More than dolphins, leeches thirty-two brains. The surface of the leech's body can be divided into 102, but the internal structure is divided into thirty-two segments. Each of these thirty-two

segments has its own segment of brain. Every leech also has two reproductive organs and nine pairs of testes (eighteen!).

8. Cows have very complex friendships, and when they are isolated from their companions, they experience separation anxiety.

9. Galapagos turtles sleep for sixteen hours a day and can go for a year without food or water.



10. Plants can be male and female, with male and female sex organs. Some common gardening plants are hermaphrodites and therefore are both male and female - like some humans.

Translation: God *did* create 'Adam' and 'Steve'!

11. An earthworm has five hearts.

My intention brothers and sisters in Christ, is not necessarily to try and convince you of anything.



For to do so would be to try to inscribe something on stone that you can somehow feel. Instead, I encourage you, particularly this autumn as the leaves turn so many colors, to intentionally seek out opportunities to be exposed to and to appreciate the diversity of God's creation.



For only if you appreciate difference will you be nauseated and sickened when you learn that this past week a twelve-year old black girl at a Christian school was pinned down by three white boys as they cut off her dreadlocks. If we cannot appreciate diversity, we cannot care when it is snuffed out! So, seek opportunities to appreciate! Take long walks in the woods.



Like Stephanie and I, notice how many mushrooms grow on Mt. Wantastiquet. Gaze at Heidi's flower bed in front of our church and admire the beautiful differences therein. Even in the midst of our own congregation, rejoice at the contributions our men make. Feel blessed by the stalwart contributions of our women.



Rejoice that both gay and straight are welcome and affirmed in our church. All of us have been wonderfully created, with many different abilities and characteristics.



Appreciate, as the apostle Paul states, “that through faith, you are all sons [and daughters] of God in union with Christ Jesus”. We are all different and the same. Thanks be to God!

This was the word of God, and it was preached to the people of God and the people of God responded, “Amen”.