

New Hope sermon multicultural family

I believe a vibrant multicultural church comes from the gathering of people who are global Christians aligned with God's heart. Being a multicultural family is one of our core values at New Hope. To me Mother Teresa exemplifies the fruit of that vision. She says, "By blood and origin, I am all Albanian. My citizenship is Indian. I am a Catholic nun. As to my calling, I belong to the whole world. As to my heart, I belong entirely to Jesus. *Mother Teresa, quoted by Ruth A. Tucker in Guardians of the Great Commission. Christianity Today, Vol. 33, no. 17.*



She has built her mission around unity in diversity when all those involved from many nations gather together to pray and serve the destitute and dying around the world.

Why is this vision so important in today's world? If "culture is the widening of the mind and of the spirit," then as people from different cultures interact, our minds and spirits are widened even further. In fact diversity has been called "the art of thinking independently together. In other words, we provide a stimulus and environment where each other's thinking can sharpen and broaden the others' as we think together. Arthur Ashe, the world class African American tennis player, put it this way: "My potential is more than can be expressed within the bounds of my race or ethnic identity." In fact, Ashe broke many cultural and racial barriers as he rose to preeminence in what used to be a white man's sport. He won three Grand Slam titles. Ashe was the first black player selected to the United States Davis Cup team and the only black man ever to win the singles title at Wimbledon, the US Open, and the Australian Open. He was ranked World No. 1 by Harry Hopman in 1968 and by Lance Tingay of *The Daily Telegraph* and *World Tennis Magazine* in 1975.^{[3][4]} In the ATP computer rankings, he peaked at No. 2 in May 1976. He retired in 1980. (Arthur Ashe website on Google)

Using a different analogy, a global world when we interact in peace together is like a symphony orchestra. "You don't get harmony when everybody sings the same note."

Yet today many people are choosing to eliminate all diversity in their thinking and experience and are living in filter bubbles. Here's how this is described: "Given the algorithms of search engines and social media, "we're listening to voices that reflect our own experiences, preferences and opinions. The real world effect of these informational bubbles is that we increasingly connect with people like us and increasingly disconnect from those who are not like us, deepening existing divides." This is why people can believe "fake news" – since their phones are programmed to feed them false opinions to reinforce the opinions they already have. In fact, Eric Schmidt from Google admits in today's world of the internet, "It will be very hard for people to watch or consume something that, in a real sense, has not been tailored for them." I find that very frightening. That is narrowing our participation in the global community and reinforcing all the negatives we may have or believe about other peoples and nations.

Hannah Anderson says "The effect of filter bubbles is particularly damning to the work of women's discipleship because spiritual growth demands that we process ideas that we don't like. Discipleship requires more than inspiration—it requires confrontation. But because online platforms rely on maintaining consumer goodwill and group cohesion, it's difficult to offer an alternative perspective without unsettling the tribe—the very tribe on which the entire platform rests." Hannah Anderson

This is also behind the rising nationalism seen in the West against the millions of refugees now seeking asylum from the terrors of tribal warfare and ISIS and poverty. Doors that should be opening

are closing and the fears of diversity's effects are causing people like the Alt Right in the United States to vote for nationalistic candidates who want to shut the country's borders and preserve a dominant race (of which they are a part) in their country. Martin Luther would respond that we must reach out in love across cultures: "God does not need your good works, but your neighbor does." (Jim Willis) Prejudice and ethnocentrism is definitely not Biblical and does not mirror God's heart. Let me give you 4 examples from the New Testament that form the mandate, in my mind, for a church built on multicultural community. These verses mirror God's heart:

First, the familiar verse even children brought up in the church know: *For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son so that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*" John 3:16. The "world" here in the Greek is not the physical planet earth but the community of all the world's peoples.

Then Matthew 28:18-19 – what we know as the Great Commission – Jesus' last words to his disciples before he ascended: *All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations...*The word for 'nations' in the Greek is *ta ethne* – It is much more vast in scope than political states; it means all people groups with their different cultures and languages.

The third and fourth examples are in a picture of heaven from Revelation. God has used these two pictures to continually fire my passion for a multicultural church.

First, Revelation 5:9: *"You are worthy to take the scroll and open its seals, because you were slain and with your blood you purchased people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them a kingdom and priests to serve our God. People from every tribe and language and people and nation.*

And Revelation 7:9-10- a picture of what this great multitude sings in praise to Christ *"After these things I looked and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues, standing before the Throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying "Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!"* Note the inclusiveness – all nations, all tribes, all peoples, all tongues or languages.

That's who God wants to be with Him eternally in heaven. People from every tribe and language and people and nation. And he is trusting His followers to go find these people and love them into salvation in Christ so we CAN all be together in heaven.

But so that we can handle the diversity of heaven, it is wise to start with the diversity on earth. Scot McKnight wrote a contemporary book on this called *A Fellowship of Differents*. It's an outstanding book. Let me give you 4 quotes from his book. He says:

- ❖ "the church is God's grand experiment in which differents get connected, unlikes from a fellowship, and the formally segregated are integrated. They are to be one – not scattered all over the city – and they are to be one in Christ Jesus in the salad bowl that holds the differents together. (p. 73). The church, and the United States as a nation, despite what Trump and the Alt Right says, is NOT to be a melting pot where everyone must conform to the standards and cultural idiosyncrasies of the white male culture. It IS to be a group of differents who demonstrating how to love one another."

McKnight notes that

- ❖ "Everyone was ranked by status in the Roman Empire (in Paul's time) with the wealthy getting the best dishes, and the best food and the best wine. Against this background, the gathering of the Christians reconstructed everything for the bottom up. [Power from the top down usually becomes vertical violence, as the powerless must bow to the powerful. The church

demonstrated power from the bottom up]: everyone was welcome, everyone got the same meal, everyone was equal, and everyone had one Lord, King Jesus. At the new family's table [the communion table], they were one" (p. 19).

- ❖ The best word for the church in the whole New Testament is not the word *church*, a word for a gathered assembly, the best word for the church is *fellowship*, which simply means that we share life with one another. That's precisely what happened to the first Christians when the Spirit of God plopped them all together in those house churches across the Roman Empire. Such an odd box of different" (p.111)
- ❖ And, "the only way the church can be God's kind of church is through the power of the Spirit. Only the Spirit empowers us to transcend differences and to transform our preferences into love for others" (p. 192)

The Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir has always been a model of that for me. The choir is now 270 members – and they are Latino, African American, various white ethnicities and perhaps a few Asians. They are doctors, attorneys and former street people, nurses and ex-crack addicts. But they sing together for Jesus. In fact, the way Carol Cymbala conducts their rehearsal each week, they act like a church within a church. People share their testimonies, they pray for each other and they learn how to tune their voices to the styles and pitch of those around them. It is no surprise President Obama chose them to sing at his presidential inauguration because they represent so much of the country's races and cultures, working together with a common goal. The music they sing, as well, is as diverse, as the cultural backgrounds of the members. Sometimes you will hear an African American beat and solo – sometimes you will hear Spanish in words and in a soloist; sometimes you will hear more western style music – all for the glory of God.

This is the goal of New Hope in our multicultural family. In fact, we chose 4 different songs in worship today to represent that diversity – *Halle, Hallelujah (Caribbean)*, *Te Amo (Spanish)*, *We Your people praise you (English)*, and *We are singing for the Lord is our light (African)*.

This calligraphy pictures all these values rolled up into one body:



When we live like this together, rather than separated into our monocultural groups or filter bubbles, the world has a chance to see Jesus in the flesh. Tell others about our church, beloved, because there are not many churches where the extent of the diversity exists and where people can get a legitimate view of heaven: *“After these things I looked and behold, a great multitude which no one could number, of all nations, tribes, peoples and tongues, standing before the Throne and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, saying “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” Amen and Amen.*

Let us pray.

Dr. M.L. Codman-Wilson 11/19/17

Song of response: All Hail the Power of Jesus Name.