



In Loving Color
Message Notes, July 15, 2018
2 Corinthians 8:1-5, 9:6-11

Our Core Value #4, Unity in Diversity, says: “Because God unites us in the essentials, we can celebrate our diversity in the non-essentials ... promoting a diversity of spiritual gifts, and racial, social and spiritual backgrounds.” This is Us – united in Jesus and enriched by diversity. Racial “unity in diversity” has been a meaningful part of our journey. God has been steadily teaching us to live out His life in loving color!

The call to unity and the celebration of diversity are sown throughout the fabric of God’s Word:

- Genesis 1:27 – Imago Dei (all humans made in the image of God)
- Genesis 12 – God declares He is raising up Abram to “bless all peoples of the earth”
- 1 John 4:15-18 – Loving God means loving our brother (tangibly and sincerely)
- John 17:20-23 – Jesus’ passionate prayer that we, His people, would be one (as they, the Trinity are)
- 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 – The analogy of the church as one body with vital and beautiful different parts
- Galatians 3:26-28 – All are children of God; there is no longer any Jew/Greek, slave/free, male/female
- Ephesians 2:14 – He is our peace; making the two one; destroying the barrier ...

God has made us, with all our delightful differences, to be His one people for all eternity. We celebrate the richness of our diversity. We rejoice in the glory of our unity. God calls us not to be color blind, but color blessed!

This value of “unity in diversity” has been in CCC from the very beginning. More than just an outward objective (let’s make sure we look diverse on Sundays), but rather a deep conviction that if we seek Jesus, make Him known, and genuinely love our neighbor, diversity will be a natural fruit of the Holy Spirit’s work in us.

Our diversity has not come quickly or easily.

1. Prayer – passionately and regularly praying for God to form us into a diverse community.
2. Location – we intentionally looked for properties that would keep us in the middle of the city. Our first long-term location was on Midtown Drive, just south of Macon Road. Then, in seeking land to purchase for our permanent home, we did not go out, but wanted to stay “in town.” God graciously led us to this Milgen Road property. (In response to our prayers for diversity, in our early years, African Americans would show up on Sundays, saying “God told us to come here.”)
3. Leadership – We made meaningful progress in diversity as we began to affirm and invite diverse leadership in Sunday worship (little by little), on teams, on our board, and on staff. Derrick and Andrea Shields were a huge part of God’s grace to move us forward into enriching diversity. Derrick began volunteering in leadership, then he came on staff quarter-time, then half-time, then full-time, then he became Executive Pastor, and now he will be our Lead Pastor. What a gift he and Andrea have been, and so faithful to “hang in there,” because it has not been a simple, easy journey.
4. Honest (difficult) conversations – Honest Sunday messages around tumultuous social events, calling us to address messy things with truth, love and unity. ... And small group studies (“In



Loving Color”) that have opened us up to each other around challenging issues, and even moreso, around the struggles and pains of our personal stories.

5. Conferences: The Kainos Conference on racial reconciliation in Memphis, and Converge 2:14 conference here in Columbus.

All these intentional initiatives have moved us forward, but the most powerful dimension in all of these is the sharing of our stories. God teaching us how to:

- Listen (with my heart) to another’s pain and struggle.
- Seek first to understand and then to be understood.
- Embrace perspective that is deeper and fuller than my own experience.
- Deal with my own “beams” before I try to point out the specs in my brother’s eye. (Matt. 7:3-5)

Keith and Derrick shared their own personal journeys around racism and reconciliation – similar in many ways, but with opposite growing edges: Derrick learning to forgive and let God heal his hurts; Keith discovering the more subtle roots of racism that God has been steadily pruning from his life. Their journeys have brought them together, each being a source of healing and freedom to the other. They have become co-workers in God’s kingdom, good friends and deeply devoted brothers.

Acts 10 – the story of God bringing Peter and Cornelius together to reveal His desire and plan to tear down the racial divide of Jew and Gentile, for “there is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all” (Ephesians 4:4-5).

Reconciliation lessons we learn from this story:

1. Intentionality. Yes, God was leading and there were dreams and visions operating, but both Peter and Cornelius responded with intentionality to God’s stirring: Cornelius sent his servants to Peter’s house. Peter received them, let them in, and they spent the night there (taboo in Jewish law!). Then Peter went with them to Cornelius’ house, entered, fellowshipped with them, and then stayed several days.
2. Jesus is the answer.
 - The gospel was the catalyst for transformation (vv. 34-43).
 - The Holy Spirit was poured out on Cornelius’ family (vv. 44-46).
 - Redemption opened the way for new relationship.
3. This good work will be opposed (vv. 11:1-3).
4. Repentance leads to reconciliation and revival (v. 11:18).

May we pray for reconciliation – first in our own hearts, then for God to continue to grow this in our church, our city, and our nation.

May we be intentional to pursue others of a different race or background, sharing our stories, listening deeply to understand. May we schedule breakfasts, lunches or shared meals in our homes for such conversations. May we ask more often, “What’s for dinner?”

May we be truly open to the Holy Spirit to reveal the fractured places of our hearts – deep hurts, arrogance, judgment, unforgiveness, resentments ... to allow His grace to heal and free us. May we celebrate the gift of diversity and the joy of unity in Jesus!