

# Variety is the Spice of... the Church

A sermon by the Rev. Dr. Jon M. Fancher  
Rocky River Presbyterian Church, Rocky River, Ohio  
May 26, 2019

- 1 Corinthians 12:12, 16-20 (Good News Translation) <sup>12</sup> Christ is like a single body, which has many parts; it is still one body, even though it is made up of different parts.... <sup>16</sup> [And] if the ear were to say, "Because I am not an eye, I don't belong to the body," that would not keep it from being a part of the body. <sup>17</sup> If the whole body were just an eye, how could it hear? And if it were only an ear, how could it smell? <sup>18</sup> As it is, however, God put every different part in the body just as he wanted it to be. <sup>19</sup> There would not be a body if it were all only one part! <sup>20</sup> As it is, there are many parts but one body.
- Philippians 4:8
  - New Revised Standard Version Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.
  - The Message translation Summing it all up, friends, I'd say you'll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious – the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse.
- Sermon-in-a-sentence: Variety and diversity are God's gift to the Church.

We've all heard the term "orthodoxy." Literally, orthodoxy means "lined-up opinion." In other words, a demand for orthodoxy means that you have to "fall in line" or you don't belong. I love the Presbyterian Church because we don't demand a "forced orthodoxy."

Make no mistake: if you want to call the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) your spiritual home, you must embrace Jesus Christ. You need to accept that God sent Jesus into our world to save you from a life of self-focused futility and to connect you with the Eternal God's infinite love and mercy. In more familiar words, Jesus is your Master and Savior. Presbyterian Christians, like all other Christians, place our trust in God through Jesus the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit.

But the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) doesn't dictate *how* you experience the development of a relationship to God through Jesus:

- maybe you experience a moment of revelation;
- maybe you undergo a time of crisis that suddenly causes the church to become a haven of safety and nurture for you;
- maybe you are raised in the faith and have never known a time when you *didn't* embrace Jesus as Lord and Savior.

The Presbyterian church acknowledges that people come to faith in God through Jesus Christ in different ways and at different points in their lives – variety in personal experience is "okay."

We Presbyterians even believe that our sacred texts can show a degree of variety.

- It's easy to forget that the books of the Old and New Testaments weren't written in English. We're reading English translations of ancient texts originally written in Hebrew or Greek.
- Of course, English is not the only language the ancient texts have been translated into: a quick search will show you that the entire Bible has been translated into nearly 700 different languages, and *portions* of the Bible have been translated into twice that many.
- Across the centuries, research, scholarship and archaeology have shed new light on the ancient texts, producing corrections or clarifications of the scriptures.
- Translations of scripture have changed across the years because languages evolve over time – English as spoken in Shakespeare's day was different from American English or even British English today

- Different generations speak the language differently. That’s why translations abound: translations for scholarly use, translations aimed at children, translations as popular literature, translations for English language-learners, etc. A variety of translations can provide different perspectives, different insight into the scriptural truth intended by biblical authors. As an example, notice how the same passage might strike you a little differently as you hear Philippians Chapter 4, verse 8 from two different translations:
  - *New Revised Standard Version*  
Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.
  - *The Message translation*  
Summing it all up, friends, I’d say you’ll do best by filling your minds and meditating on things true, noble, reputable, authentic, compelling, gracious – the best, not the worst; the beautiful, not the ugly; things to praise, not things to curse.

The Presbyterian Church is part of the Christian tradition that embraces variety, diversity, difference – because of Jesus we are one regardless of differences we may display. As we heard in those familiar lines from 1 Corinthians Chapter 12, “Christ is like a single body, which has many parts; it is still one body, even though it is made up of different parts.”<sup>1</sup>

This morning I wanted to demonstrate the worthiness of variety in Christian worship by using music. We’re going to hear two different versions of a song based on the hymn we sang at the beginning of today’s service. We call that hymn “Fairest Lord Jesus,” but other arrangements often call it “Beautiful Savior.” First we’re going to hear “Beautiful Savior” sung by the St. Olaf College Choir, for decades a chorus that has been admired around the world. One of my wife’s former students sang in that choir. The St. Olaf College Choir ends every concert by singing this arrangement of “Beautiful Savior.”

Immediately after that we’re going to hear “Beautiful Savior” as arranged and performed by Vocal Spectrum, an award-winning barbershop quartet. Theirs is quite a different style from the St. Olaf Choir version, but I wonder if you’ll find that despite its difference, it, too, is a powerful interpretation of an inspiring text. The texts are printed on the front cover, but you can just close your eyes while you listen if you want.

- *St. Olaf College Choir’s “Beautiful Savior”* – <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0QJ4TkIcSkk>
- *Vocal Spectrum’s “Beautiful Savior”* – [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yuRT\\_vOFG-0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yuRT_vOFG-0)

Maybe you preferred one version over the other, or you didn’t care for either, or you were stirred by both of them. One tune, different arrangements, different styles, different moods... but despite their variety they both proclaim the truth that Jesus is fairer, Jesus is purer, Jesus is worthy of our glory, honor, praise and adoration.

The two renditions symbolize how diversity, difference, variety enrich the lives we share in this community of faith. As we heard from the apostle Paul, “...God put every different part in the body just as he wanted it to be. There would not be a body if it were all only one part! As it is, there are many parts but one body.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:12 Good News Translation

<sup>2</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:19-20 Good News Translation