

So, today begins the third week of my August sermon series.

This month, we are parsing out our church's new vision statement, which we adopted this past February.

This morning, we're going to explore how, "*We respect the sanctity of each person's spiritual journey and [how] we are blessed by the gifts that each person brings to the life of the church*".

If you have been here the past few weeks, this might sound familiar, which is good.

Our vision statement speaks to what our values are and how we are being called to live them in this world.

It should be familiar to you, like the pledge of allegiance or the Lord's Prayer.

So, I'll read it, again, in its entirety, and you can listen for the portion in which we name that we respect everyone's spiritual journey and celebrate the gifts that each person brings to our church.

So here goes, "*At the UCC Burlington, we cultivate a thriving environment, which empowers us to embody the beloved, diverse community that Jesus modeled for us, proclaiming that all are welcome, all are loved.*

We celebrate our colonial roots as we change, adapt and grow into who God is calling us to be.

We respect the sanctity of each person's spiritual journey and we are blessed by the gifts that each person brings to the life of the church.

We join together in faithful service and advocacy with the ongoing hope that we can make the world a better, more just, and peaceful place for everyone."

Each of us is a living, breathing, collage, made up of different experiences, and no two of us are the same.

We come from different backgrounds, different classes, different family configurations, different parents with different parenting styles.

We were raised in different generations with different relationships with technology.

We have different levels of education.

Some of us are parents, some of us aren't, some of us are grandparents, some of us have raised other people's children.

Some of us have experienced poverty, some of us haven't.

Some of us have healthy bodies, some of us feel like our lives have been a series of health problems strung together.

We all have different relationships with grief and loss and death and love.

And we have different understandings of God, of faith, of the afterlife.

Some of us are very devout, while others of us feel like we are in a tug-of-war with God.

Some of us don't really believe in God.

Others of us rely on God as a firm foundation in our lives.

Others of us don't really know either way, we are more focused on Jesus and our church community.

We also have different definitions of what it means to be a Christian, and of how that identity should be lived out in our lives.

Our church is like a kaleidoscope.

Each of us is a different color, constantly shifting and turning.

And when we combine our beautiful landscape of ever-changing colors, we make a composite picture that is never the same.

That is our church.

And with all our differences, it's a miracle that we're able to gather together, each Sunday morning, and experience communal worship together through a shared language.

This is what I think our statement means when it says that we respect each person's spiritual journey.

We are called to respect each other's life paths and the different twists and turns that each person's path took to bring them to this place.

That's what we have in common, that we are all here, as a part of this faith community.

We can't be a beautiful kaleidoscope of colors if we are isolated and disconnected from one another.

It's in combining our journeys and experiences that our beauty is magnified.

It is my hope that despite all of those things that make us different, that we can agree that we are called to work together to serve God, however we understand that God, and to help improve the world through our faith expressions.

I hope that whatever being a Christian means to you, that it includes the moral compulsion to serve the world.

And guess what?

It takes all types to serve the world, because the world is filled with a multitude of needs.

As is our church community.

We can't all be good at the same thing, because then we'd only be able to meet one of the world's needs.

As our scripture from Paul's letter to the Romans said this morning,

"For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function,

⁵*so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another.*

⁶*We have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us.”*
(Romans 12: 4-5).

We need carpenters and accountants.

We need bakers, cooks, artists and musicians.

We need extroverts and introverts.

We need those who enjoy public speaking and those who abhor it.

We need writers and teachers.

We need people who are active listeners.

We need prayerful people and critical thinkers.

We need idealists and pragmatists.

We need Trinitarians and Unitarians and those who aren't sure.

We need people who are big-picture thinkers and we need people who are detail-oriented.

We need dreamers and doers.

We need people who are spontaneous and people who are planners.

We need tidy people and messy people.

We need peacemakers and rebel rousers.

We need people who carefully calculate what they are going to say, and we need people who speak off the cuff, whenever they are inspired.

We need wealthy people and poor people and everyone in the middle.

We need people who seemingly have it all together and people who feel like they are falling apart.

We need everyone. It's true.

Because whatever qualities and characteristics add up to make you, YOU, those are your spiritual gifts.

That's what you have to bring to this place, to add to the vibrancy and diversity.

These are the gifts you that you bring to the table, and say, here, this is me, how can I be of service?

I promise you, there is a place here in our community where your gifts can be utilized.

And if it doesn't feel like there's a place for you to share your gifts, then let that be known, and we will make a place.

So, when you came in this morning, you should've gotten a little piece of paper that looks like a gift.

We are now going to take a few minutes to reflect upon and write down the spiritual gifts that we have to offer the church.

You don't have to write your name.

It's anonymous.

But in a few minutes, after we've all had a chance to write, Debbie and I will collect them all and they'll be hung up, so we can see the spiritual gifts that we all bring to the life of the church.

Now, is there anyone who didn't get a slip of paper or who doesn't have something to write with?

Great.

Okay, now we'll take a few moments to write down what we have to offer.

After papers are collected, stand at front of church with baskets and pray...

Holy one, we thank you for the different spiritual paths that each of us have taken, which have brought us to this community of faith. Help us to use the gifts that we've identified to serve this church, this community and the wider world. Amen.