



## **Week 1**

### **March 1**

#### **Why is March Multi-Cultural Emphasis Month?**

A helpful pastoral admonition to all believers is to live and to be what we are in Jesus Christ. Because believers are in union with Christ we find ourselves justified and accounted as perfectly righteous as we are in Him. We are adopted as we are in Him. We are holy as we are in Him. Because we are the set apart sons and daughters of God, clothed in the perfect righteousness of Christ and accepted in the Beloved, we ought to live like it, live in keeping with who we are.

That's a very personal thing, but we must not limit it to merely individualistic concerns. Believers corporately ought to live and be what we are in Jesus Christ. We are the body of Christ, with all members united. We are the Bride of Christ, being beautified and waiting for the marriage supper of the Lamb. And, we are the picture that John paints for us in Revelation 7:9.

*"After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands...."*

Since in Jesus and through the work of the Holy Spirit down through the ages, the Church is this holy, multi-national, multi-tribal, and multi-lingual multitude, that one day will stand before the throne and before the Lamb, shouldn't we live like it now? Shouldn't we live in keeping with who we are as the Church of Jesus Christ?

Like Moderator Phil Williams last year, I will join the efforts of Outreach North America and name March as Multicultural Emphasis Month. Many of our leaders will be sharing devotions and exhortations throughout the month to help our denomination remind

ourselves of who we are in Christ as His Church – a great multi-ethnic and multi-cultural multitude united together in one hope, one faith, one baptism. May the devotions to come call us to live in keeping with who we are, remembering that small, humble, and even frail beginnings are what our great God revels in using for His great purposes!  
*Don't Despise the Day of Small Things!*

We will send you a devotion in the same format as this email each day in March. We will also send you printable devotions and will post the devotions on the ONA website.

Grace & Peace,  
Rev. Lee Shelnut, Synod Moderator

#### Questions for Further Study

1. What does today's passage teach us about the character of God?
2. What are some other passages of Scripture that also teach us this?
3. How does today's passage and devotion lead you to pray? How does it lead you to act?

**March 2**  
**Alex Coblentz**  
**French Camp Presbyterian Church**

#### **Psalm 36:7-8**

*The children of mankind take refuge in the shadow of your wings,  
They feast on the abundance of your house.*

Grocery list: 4 lbs of lamb, 4 pigs feet, 1 gallon of palm oil, 1 catfish, 2 jars of peanut butter, 1 lb of shrimp, a box of plantain fou-fou... Hey, wait a minute! What's cooking here, anyway?

"The List" had us all over the international aisle at Kroger, at the Asian Market, and the African – Caribbean Grocery. We were shopping for two students – one from Liberia and another from Sierra Leone – cooking their favorite dishes for the International Covered Dish Supper to kick off our annual Mission Conference.

"You prepare a table before me..." (Psalm 23:5) now has new meaning for me. Preparing and sharing ethnic food can be the relational bridge that overcomes cultural and language barriers that ordinarily would divide us. Especially where there is a multicultural diversity present, it can be exciting to savor and appreciate the flavors that are a "taste of home" for many who have been displaced for whatever reason from their places of origin. If the parables and metaphors of Scripture include banquets and

feasting in the Lord's presence (Song of Solomon 2:4, Matt 22:2-3, Rev. 19:7-10) why then should we not gather the nations around our church dinners for a spicy foretaste of glory?

As Truett Cathy has famously said, "Food is essential to life, therefore make it good." Food is also the perfect catalyst for hospitality, and for reaching out and building relationships with those whom God has placed within reach of our invitation (Hebrews 13:2), so make it good!

By the way, lamb was too expensive so we had to settle for goat meat. It was a tasty (and spicy!!) stew, and two young girls from Africa were able to share their own home cooking with their friends and our church family.

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#### **March 3**

**Andrew Di Iulio**

**Greenville ARP Church**

#### **James 1:27**

*Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.*

In early 1998 my father was sent to Kosovo to take part in the U.S. Military's intervention in the ethnic genocide of Kosovar Albanians. During the armed conflict, my father would call, write, and AIM (new and exciting technology at the time) with updates from the military base. By the end of April 1999, roughly 600,000 residents of Kosovo had been made refugees and another 400,000 were displaced inside Kosovo. These numbers pale in comparison to the current refugee crises, with 13.5 million Syrian refugees alone.

As my father, an army chaplain, communicated with us over those months, he told us of the children he saw. He told us of the hunger, sadness, anger, and even the death of some of these young people as he did what he could to show them the love of Christ in the gospel. A very vivid picture was painted for this 12-year-old boy living in America who had security in every sense of the word. So, I declared that I wanted to invite every one of them to live with us in my room.

James 1:27 tells us that what it really means to be a Christian is to love and serve the needy – particularly the most helpless – in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world. Often, we feel as though we are keeping clean by keeping to ourselves. In reality, the true stain comes when we harden our hearts to the call of the gospel to “get our hands dirty” in helping the afflicted. I realize now that my father was very intentional in what he shared. His desire, and the desire of our heavenly Father, is that we see beyond ourselves and help others. May we all see the needs of others with the eyes of little children.

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#### **March 4**

**Rev. Andrew Shoger**

**Coddle Creek ARP Church**

#### **Revelation 7:9-12**

*After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, “Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!” And all the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures, and they fell on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying, “Amen! Blessing and glory and wisdom and thanksgiving and honor and power and might be to our God forever and ever! Amen.*

While many parts of the book of Revelation are masked in symbolism that leave us with more questions than answers, there are other portions of John’s vision that stir within us a deep longing for the glories of the ‘not yet.’ One of those is found in today’s passage, as we see an innumerable multitude from “every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.” God’s ministry of reconciliation is not for one particular people group, but for all the nations!

The things that differentiate us from one another in this world: race, language, culture, etc. are bridged by our mutual faith in Jesus Christ. Or, as Paul puts it in Ephesians 2:14, “He Himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in His flesh the dividing wall of hostility....” The fact that we have to use the term “multi-cultural” to distinguish churches that are comprised of a mix of cultures and races from those that

are largely homogenous demonstrates that the oneness Christ has made possible in His flesh has not yet been fully embraced here on earth. There are various reasons for this failure. Practically, we realize that embracing other cultures and customs may require us to adjust what we are comfortable with in worship and ministry. However, it could also be that lurking in some of our hearts is a distrust or even a disdain for those who are not like us. Old patterns and prejudices can be hard to break, but that is exactly what Jesus has empowered His people to do by the breaking of His body! We can't love Christ and hate our brother (1 John 2:9). Let's not wait until Heaven to lift our voices with our brothers and sisters in praise of OUR God! Ask the Lord today to give you His heart for every tongue, tribe, and nation.

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#### **March 5**

**Anthony Pizzuti**

**Starmount ARP Church**

#### **Acts 9:15**

*But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel."*

In Acts 9:15, Jesus sends one of his followers (Ananias) to see the newly converted Apostle Paul to inform him of his new mission. Jesus said to Ananias, "Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel." Carrying the name of Jesus to all peoples is key to building diversity in the church. Paul brought much encouragement to everyone he encountered (Acts 13:47-48).

This rings true in our day even though it remains difficult for many to embrace diversity. America is fast becoming a more equally balanced, multi-cultural nation. Every time you visit a restaurant, a university, or go to a public event, look around you and see how many ethnic groups you see. Many neighborhoods are mirroring this reality bringing changes in community relations.

I was overwhelmed one day while participating in our soccer outreach program to our community. The time came for a devotion. We sat in a circle in the middle of the field with the kids huddled around us. Sitting around me were children from 4 different ethnic groups. Their parents were looking on, fellowshiping on the sidelines. At the end

of the devotion we asked if anyone wanted to pray – 2 prayed in 2 different languages. What a beautiful picture of the diversity of the church! What a blessed moment the Lord gave me! It is joyfully passed on to you!

May our gracious God move us to appreciate the beautiful diversity he has put around us. May we open our doors (church and home) to all people groups God has placed around us under the auspices of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Together, let us “carry” the name of Jesus to all we encounter.

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**March 6**

**Rev. Bob Hovey**

**Jacksonville, FL**

**Romans 10:15b**

*“How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!”*

How much duller would the world be if it were only one color? All blue? All green? What if you opened a box of crayons only to find 35 crayons of the same color? How disappointing! If the Lord were to “open the top” off our churches today, what would He find? Our churches should reflect our communities, but if our community is all one race, maybe we’ll have to go beyond our community “walls” to reach the lost of another race. Jesus certainly left His “comfort zone” to do the same!

“People (all people) don’t care what you know, until they know that you care.” I like to spell “care” like this... “t - i - m- e.” By spending time with others in “their world,” in their homes, with their family and friends, we demonstrate the loving outreach of Jesus Christ.

The ministry will be messy when differences in backgrounds, education, experiences, and family dynamics come together. But, in so many ways we are similar to one another as pilgrims in a foreign land.

At our mission church we used to say, “Stand up, look around you, THIS is what heaven will look like – a box of crayons – isn’t it beautiful?!”

Pray that God would give you the opportunity to meet someone new, someone who doesn't look like you. Open your eyes, your ears, your hearts – you will see them, He will bring them to you.

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#### **March 7**

**Amanda Cooksey**

**Story: *Reweaving Shalom***

The summer after I graduated college, I moved to Savannah, Georgia to spend a year volunteering with a service corps. I was placed at the Good Samaritan Clinic, a free medical clinic for individuals living 200% below the poverty level. The majority of the patient population was Spanish speaking, and even though I had minored in Spanish as an undergrad, I hadn't had much practice out of the classroom. My very first day of work, one of the providers asked if I would translate a bit for one of the patients who had a rash. She had me ask the woman if she had been washing her body with a different kind of soap. I attempted to ask the question, except instead of using the Spanish word for soap (jabón), I said "sopa," which translated to, "Are you using a different kind of soup to wash your body?" The patient smiled, gently corrected me, and we both laughed as I realized what I said. Somehow that mistake became a gracious and necessary nudge for me to ignore the fears and doubts in my head and to step out towards engaging with people.

Ministry across cultures has shown me a love outside the confines of this world, a deep love rooted in Christ that is freely given and widely received. I have learned how Jesus is not bound to one language or culture, but how in stepping out towards people we learn more of Him in the process. I read a quote from Ann Voskamp that said, "We are each singular threads in the world. We all get to decide what we will tie our lives to. If I tie my resources, my time, only to the thin thread of my own life-my life is a hopelessly knotted mess. The thread of your life becomes a tapestry of abundant colors only it ties itself to other lives. The only way to strengthen the fabric of society is to let the threads of your life break away to let Christ, who is in us, weave around other threads." I still don't speak perfect Spanish, but I'm learning to push through the boundaries for the sake of people. Reweaving shalom means to sacrificially thread, lace, and press your time goods, power, and resources into the lives and needs of other. The Church has the opportunity to engage in ministry across cultures, to invite people near, and to encounter Jesus more through it all.