

May 24, 2026—The Day of Pentecost
The Rev. James Wyatt

How manifold are your works

“O Holy One, how manifold are your works”—that’s a funny word, isn’t it? Manifold? But what I love about it is that it suggests life teeming not just in number but in variety—like, God, you have made so many, such a glorious *variety* of things. Not only are there too many living things to count teeming in the waters of the sea, but there are too many *species* to count, and countless species we have yet to discover, especially in the depths of the ocean. In fact, I saw a BBC Wildlife article in my phone news this week talking about the discovery of 1,121 new species in the ocean in the past year. It said, “1 to 2 million species are currently estimated to live in Earth’s oceans, but only around 240,000 have been formally identified.”¹ And the thousand new ones discovered in the past year range from inch-long ribbon worms to 2-foot-long deep-sea sharks. And I saw another article this week about a newly published paper describing the 60-foot-long octopus—big enough to fill this building!—that the paper calls the apex predator of the Cretaceous era’s oceans, between 72 and 100 million years ago.² “Creatures both small and great,” indeed.

“O Holy One, how manifold—how *many* and *varied*—are your works!” I think it is safe to say that our God is infinitely creative, marvelously imaginative, and in fact loves diversity. I mean, how many different species of ribbon worms or sea pens did Earth really need? Well, we still haven’t managed to catalog them all, so I guess the answer is “More!” And we see that not just in the seas, not just in the countless species of plants and animals, but also in people, the diversity within the single human species.

Our reading from the Acts of the Apostles this morning suggests that Jewish people from at least fifteen regions across all three continents of the known world, including regions beyond the reach of the Roman Empire were present in Jerusalem for the festival of Pentecost—which is the Greek name for Shavuot, the spring harvest festival, also called the festival of weeks. The implication is that there were at least fifteen different languages spoken among those gathered people, and they heard God’s praise in every one of them. That’s what’s fascinating to me about this story: the disciples could have just spoken in Greek or maybe in Aramaic, and probably most of those people would have understood. When Peter stands up to speak, we’re not told what language he speaks in, but the speech is recorded in Greek, and that seems to have been good enough. But the disciples just didn’t praise God in a common language. They spoke in every language. Their speech expressed the glorious diversity of human language and culture. I think it’s pretty cool to think that the same God who delights in at least 400 species of violets takes even greater delight in our seven thousand different languages. And God rejoices in all our different cultures and customs and maybe especially our music. God celebrates our different physical features and our different modes of dress. And maybe God even delights in all our different religions, as we praise a God of many names in all our different languages. I wonder what we might learn about God if we could learn all those languages and the words they use for God and where those words come from. And I wonder what we might learn about God if we talked with people from all over the world, all different cultures and religions about their experience of the Sacred, the Holy, the More. What if we could hear the ways our stories are similar and the ways they are different, and instead of assuming that one story is right and the other one is wrong, maybe figure that there’s something to be learned from our differences as well as from our similarities?

“O Holy One, how many and varied are your works!” For there are 235 varieties of sea pens—which are corals, many of which resemble big quill pens, and there are 840 different

¹ https://apple.news/AYywgV_B6QRKHHW0YJ61G7g

² https://apple.news/A1fZNMx5pTZyGgdggaYt8_A

languages spoken in the single country of Papua New Guinea, and “there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.” I’ve been talking a lot recently about how we’re made in the image of God and we’re growing more and more into the likeness of Christ. And what I should maybe say more is that the image of God looks different in every human being. And the likeness of Christ looks different in each and every one of us. And that’s not a problem, that’s what the God who created 285 varieties of squirrels—ground squirrels, tree squirrels, flying squirrels, and more—that’s what God intends for us. To grow more and more into the likeness of Christ means that I’m growing into a more Christ-like me and you’re growing into a more Christ-like you, and those are beautifully and wonderfully different. When the Spirit of God descended on the disciples on Pentecost, it didn’t make them all speak with a single voice, and it didn’t turn them into carbon copies of each other. The Spirit of God in us gives us our variety of gifts, stirs us into our variety of services, and activates our variety of activities. It makes us better versions of ourselves, in all our diversity, all our variety, all our differences. “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” All the different limbs and organs and cells that make up the Body of Christ all have their function, their gifts, their beautiful unique qualities that are meant to make the Body better.

What are the gifts that the Spirit has given you for the common good? Bearing in mind that Paul’s lists of spiritual gifts—the one we heard *auf Deutsch* this morning, the one in Romans, and others like them—are not meant to be exhaustive, any more than Paul could list every species in the ocean, I want to invite you to think about the gifts you have for making the Body of Christ better. What are the services you can perform, the activities you can engage in, to build up the common good of this church and the wider community?

You know, one of the challenges of being a church with a bivocational priest who works only half-time for the church is that more of the day-to-day labor of keeping this place running falls on you all. And I say “one of the challenges,” but that is also really a gift. Because all of us are called to live out our Christian vocation by contributing our spiritual gifts to the upbuilding of our communities. And it’s much, much better for everyone involved if you have the chance to do that instead of delegating that work to a paid professional. You can’t delegate discipleship. It’s by doing the work of ministry together that each of us learns how to be the better versions of ourselves that God is calling us to be. And what we practice here, in building up the Body of Christ, we carry with us out into the world, for the common good of our cities, our nation, and the world. The world desperately needs our best selves, our most loving and compassionate selves, in every area of our lives.

Oh, friends, I look out at this congregation and I see, what, sixty-ish uniquely different reflections of the image of God. What a beautiful sight!

“O Holy One, how manifold are your works,” how varied and beautiful is your image in the faces of all your people! Breathe out your Holy Spirit on each of us gathered here, that we may continue growing into more Christ-like versions of our unique and beautiful selves, the very best we can be. Stir up our gifts and services and activities for the common good, empowered by the Spirit of Pentecost, and grant us your peace. Amen.