



# Core Value: Inclusivity

## "Tending the Orchard"

Fall 2016 Sermon Series

The following day they came to Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. On Peter's arrival Cornelius met him, and falling at his feet, worshiped him. But Peter made him get up, saying, "Stand up; I am only a mortal." And as he talked with him, he went in and found that many had assembled; and he said to them, "You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean." Acts 10:24-28

I'm not sure if it's comforting or disturbing to know that Peter, the disciple, struggled with the idea of inclusion. His whole life he was taught a set of rules that showed him who was clean and who was unclean, or who was in and who was out. He saw Jesus break these rules. Yet even after Jesus' ascension, as Peter did the work of building the Church, he clung to his rules of who is in and who is out. It wasn't until he had a dream, or vision, that he began to see that God loves Jews and Gentiles alike. It wasn't until a Gentile (non-Jew) sought him out that he articulated an inclusive understanding of God's love. Peter became inclusive. Peter began to understand grace.

Grace is a gift from God given to every person from the moment they are born. It is a gift that shows that each person is of sacred worth. This grace is manifest in God's desire for relationship with us, and God's equipping us with gifts. Orchard United Methodist Church is a grace-filled community committed to acting like Jesus. Therefore we love and accept everyone. We value all people, their gifts, and the relationships we form together as a diversity of people. We believe that God's intention is for us to be in community together insuring that all are included and loved.

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One of the things that defines us as a United Methodist Church is open communion. We believe that everyone is welcome at Christ's table. Don't you love to see the children come forward to partake in the communion experience? At the same time, the elements are brought to those for whom walking is a struggle. We use grape juice in communion so that children, alcoholics, and those who choose not to drink can fully participate. Communion sets the stage for how we are to be with one another. Welcoming all. Loving all. Finding value in all as we share together.

Each one of us is designed with gifts to build the Body of Christ. We are at our best when we are an inclusive church because we recognize that each person has something to teach us—from the youngest among us to the oldest among us. The diversity of experiences, cultures, and gifts enriches us. When we are loving and valuing everyone, I believe we begin to glimpse the Kingdom of God. We see our own vision of what God's family looks like. So as a church who identifies inclusivity as a core value, we value each one and commit ourselves to loving everyone as they are, as we grow together in faith.

### Questions for Reflections

- Have you ever felt excluded? If so, how did it feel?
- Have you ever felt included? If so, how did it feel?
- How does a core value of inclusivity give you a glimpse of God's kingdom?
- How do you use the gifts God has given you to build the Body of Christ?

### Prayer

God of Grace, may I always value all of your people and see your love and grace in them.  
Guide me in using my gifts to build your Body, and in valuing the gifts of your people.  
Amen.