

When I enter the educational building, I pass by a cross made for the 150th anniversary of Salem. Members made the cross with tiles they designed and painted. The cross includes tiles from adults and children; tiles with the handprints of children too young to write are in the center. After the tiles were fired, members attached them to the wall in the shape of a cross. The cross is very colorful.

While I see the cross every day, I usually pass by on the way to the office. Accustomed to seeing it, I usually don't give it much thought. Last night, I was drawn to stop and find my tile. It's in the middle of the left cross arm at the edge. It's not a fantastic work of art, but it was my contribution.

As I looked at it, I took notice of the other tiles. No two of the tiles are alike. Each bears a distinctive design. Some are hastily flung on the tile. Others are drawn with a delicate hand. The designs of some show creative thinking and planning. One looks very much like a puzzle. While each is different, when they were placed together they created something whole. If any were removed, the cross would be incomplete.

Surely, God intended the Kingdom of God to be like Salem's ceramic cross. The Kingdom of God is made up of unique individuals; no two are alike. God gifted each one with unique gifts and talents. Some are colorful; some are plain; some are wildly different. Some are loud; others are quiet. The Kingdom includes extroverts and introverts. It has those who sit in the pews, and it has those who serve on teams and as ushers and greeters. The Kingdom needs all of these people.

The joy of looking at Salem's cross is seeing all those differences. It is also the joy of the Kingdom of God. I think if we were all the same, the Kingdom of God would suffer. The uniqueness in those who belong to the Kingdom brings blessing to the Kingdom. Each one, no matter how different, has something to offer.

We may be tempted to look at certain individuals in the Kingdom and say, "That is what the kingdom should look like." We may be tempted to look at others and say, "They can't be part of the kingdom." We should avoid such temptation. For as with Salem's cross, it is only when we step back and look at the whole that we see the true shape of God's Kingdom.

Pastor Parnell