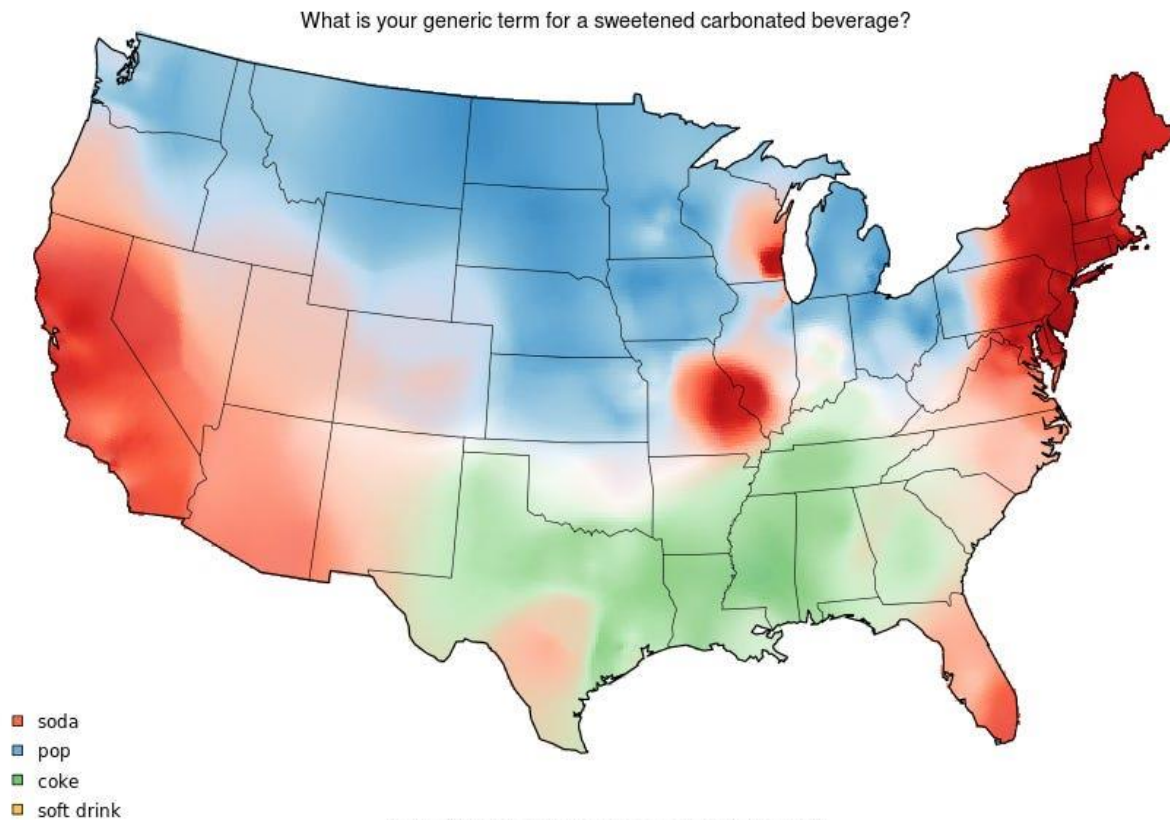


July 18, 2021

“Beyond Difference”

While there are a great deal of similarities between people because of our common humanity – there are also a surprising number of differences which are woven into our lives. There are, of course, cultural differences between countries – but even within our country we have different ways which we don’t realize exist unless we personally run across them. My first night in the Northeastern United States I went out for some food and asked the waitress, “What do you have for pop?” She put her pad down and asked, “Where are you from?”

Turns out, this is a much bigger question than one might imagine. A few years ago a book was written which explores differences in speech throughout the country and the author came up with this map to describe the difference I ran into while ordering dinner.



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Our text today from the book of Ephesians dives into a dynamic more serious than carbonated beverages – and one we tend to shy away from. **There are people with both Jewish and Gentile backgrounds in the church written to in our letter today.** And it turns out, they are struggling to get beyond their differences as they seek to live as the people of God. Their assumed knowledge and backgrounds are getting in the way of building a life of faith together.

Sound familiar? We have cultural differences in our midst: across our country, throughout our state, local communities and in our church. **Differences existing are not new.** They can be discouraging – but they are not new. **Our text today asks us to believe God is at work in our lives and in the world so these differences are unimportant.** This is especially hard for us in a world where pointing out differences and calling people names has become normal and even a source of making a living. In the face of what is normal today my grandmother - and probably your grandmother would have said, *“If you can’t say something nice, (don’t say anything at all.)*

It is hard to take grandma seriously when the stakes are high and the differences real. We can get there, of course - but **it’s easier to fall back on habit and custom.** The Jews and Gentiles had ages and ages of animosity. The assertion that in Christ the two are made into one family of faith would have been extremely hard to believe. If we think of people on the opposite sides of all the “isms” we are close to understanding the deep seeded animosity between them. Racism, classism, sexism, Your favorite sports team is awfulism. We see the divides and can despair.

Today, we are invited to grow into the reality with Christ as the cornerstone. No longer strangers to God, we are invited to grow into God’s exciting life. **Jesus gives the strength we need to lean into reality beyond division and build our connection with God and each other.**

It may be hard to hear good news in the declaration that Jesus is the cornerstone, and we are all blockheads – with apologies to Charles Shultz. The liberating power comes in embracing a life whose purpose **is to be living stones – I said stones not stoned - and grow into a dwelling place for God.** *God living in us binds us together in a way which makes the differences we believe are all too important - irrelevant.* God living in us means we lean on the risen Christ as the cornerstone of reality. And this changes everything.

Jew or Gentile? Conservative or Progressive? Chocolate or Vanilla? Jesus leads the wrecking crew to break down the dividing walls we use to define ourselves. And against all odds – by God’s grace - we discover the depths of life which exist when we define ourselves as God’s children and not by our differences. God give us the grace to live beyond difference.