

*A Lenten message from Associate Regional Minister
Rev. David Woodard.*



Labels. Labels are great when it comes to quickly identifying where something is located. I was recently in a church kitchen and sliced my finger with a knife. I was able to quickly find the first aid kit and grabbed a band aid. So **labels can be great when you're needing to find something quickly** that might otherwise be hidden.

Labels, however, are not great when we apply them to people or ideals. In fact they can be deadly, severing relationships and depriving others of their humanity. But for some reason, we are obsessed with labeling people. We want to sum up someone quickly and then put them in a nice, tight box while saying, "This is who they are and this is all they ever will be."

"This person is a Republican, so they must be an anti-abortion fascist." That person is a Democrat, so they must be a baby-kil*ing socialist." Labels like these do nothing but galvanize stereotypical beliefs while severing any relationship we might have with the person we are labeling. **By labeling others, we deprive people of their full humanity and limit them to a single narrative.** (Check out Chimamanda Adichie's TED Talk on the [Danger of a Single Story on YouTube](#)). As human beings we are so much bigger on the inside than these single/simple-minded labels.

What if we took the remainder of this Lent to **do a deep dive into how we use labels to limit others** and, thus, create an advantage for ourselves? Can we take the next few weeks exploring what it would look like if we stopped allowing others to limit us to a single story?

Labels are great when they help us quickly identify where the first aid kit is, but they are deadly when we use them to limit people's humanity.