

Unity  
United Church of Broomfield  
August 20, 2023

Psalm 133 (NRSVue)

A Song of Ascent of David

1 How very good and pleasant it is  
when kindred live together in unity!  
2 It is like the precious oil on the head,  
running down upon the beard,  
on the beard of Aaron,  
running down over the collar of his robes.  
3 It is like the dew of Hermon,  
which falls on the mountains of Zion.  
For there the Lord ordained his blessing,  
life forevermore.

John 17:20-21 (CEB)

<sup>20</sup> "I'm not praying only for them but also for those who believe in me because of their word. <sup>21</sup> I pray they will be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. I pray that they also will be in us, so that the world will believe that you sent me.

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Fifteen Psalms (120 - 134) are called "Songs of Ascents." Though the origin of the phrase is obscure, the generally accepted view is that the Hebrew term *ma'aloth* (goings up) refers to the songs sung by pilgrims on the ascending march from the Babylonian captivity to Jerusalem, or that they were sung by worshipers from all parts of Palestine as they went up to Jerusalem for the great festivals.<sup>1</sup> Jerusalem was surrounded by mountains, thus such trips involved a literal going up. It is speculated that these psalms were sung on such occasions.

Four of these 15 psalms are ascribed to David (Pss. 122; 124; 131; 133), 1 to Solomon (Ps. 127), and the other 10 are anonymous.

Today's Psalm, 133, ascribed to David, is generally referred to as, "The Pleasantness of Unity" Psalm.

- 1 How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!

How good? Well, here the word good "*tov*" is used in the widest sense such – a good thing, a good person - it can also mean, beautiful, best, better, bountiful, or cheerful. It is the same Hebrew word used in the Genesis account of creation when God looked at all They had created and pronounced it "good." Just as the Lord pronounces Their creation "good," David says it is good for the people of God to dwell together in unity. Unity is *that* good.

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<sup>1</sup> Deut. 16:16

David uses another word in Psalm 133:1. He uses the word “pleasant.”

pleasant - na'iym, naw-eem'; delightful, pleasant or sweet.

With these two words David is saying that the unity of the siblings is good—it is something good to look at. It is like seeing two of your children playing together at peace.

David also says it is pleasant. Unity of the siblings is not only a beautiful thing to look at, it evokes a pleasurable emotion or feeling. When a mother sees her children playing together and not fussing and fighting, she smiles and gets that warm feeling inside.

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Who is shown in this picture of unity? Who are the folk that the camera is focused on? Who is the artist about to apply the strokes of his brush in drawing this portrait? David says, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for siblings to dwell together in unity!”

David isn't writing, “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for **men** to dwell together in unity!” --- or for **nations** to dwell together in unity --- or for **black folk and white folk** to dwell together in unity...

It doesn't say this because David isn't referring to a superficial or surface kind of unity. He isn't talking about a unity that can be forged between the nations. He isn't writing about a unity that is only skin deep.

In the original texts, it mostly certainly said “brothers” or “brethren,” but it is beyond a shadow of a doubt that here, he doesn't refer to those who are *blood* relatives, but rather those who are *spiritually* related to one another.

If siblings are dwelling together in unity it won't matter whether they are men, women, transgendered or non-binary —there will be harmony. It won't matter what nation you are residing in or what political party you are a member of—there will be harmony. It won't matter if your skin color is different—there will be harmony.

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- 2 It is like the precious oil on the head, running down upon the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down over the collar of his robes.

In verse 2 and 3, David begins to describe the picture of unity. In verse 2, he uses the words, “it is like.”

David is comparing the unity mentioned in verse one to the oil that consecrated Aaron in Lev. 8:12. David is taking a picture of the priesthood and using it to illustrate unity. The oil spoken of was poured only on those who were of the priesthood—specifically the high priest. The Bible Knowledge Commentary notes that this oil poured on Aaron's head flowed down on his beard and shoulders, and onto the breastplate where was found the names of all the 12 tribes of Israel. It says the oil thus symbolized the unity of the nation in worship under their consecrated priest. As the oil consecrated Aaron, so the unity of the worshippers in Jerusalem would consecrate the nation under God.

Now how does this relate to us?

In addition to Lev. 8:12, Exodus 30 tells us about this costly and precious oil was poured upon the head of the high priest only. This was to be a shadow of the divine anointing of Christ as the great High Priest.

In Luke chapter four, Jesus entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, stood up to read and the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. He opened the book, and found the place where it was written, "The Spirit of the LORD is upon Me, Because They have anointed Me To preach the gospel to the poor; They have sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, To proclaim liberty to the captives And recovery of sight to the blind, To set at liberty those who are oppressed; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD."<sup>2</sup>

In Hebrews 1:9 it is written of Jesus, "You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness; Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You With the oil of gladness more than Your companions."

The oil symbolizes the unity of believers, those unified in worship under their consecrated Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, those of us who have trusted in Jesus Christ as Savior are brought into union with one another by Jesus' sacrifice.

In John 17, Jesus says, "And for their sakes I sanctify myself, so that they also may be sanctified in truth. I ask not only on behalf of these but also on behalf of those who believe in me through their word, **that they may all be one**. As you, [Abba], are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one, so that the world may know that you have sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me" (vv. 19-23).

The United Church of Christ advocates the ideal of, "In essentials—unity, in nonessentials—diversity, in all things—charity;" a saying from 17<sup>th</sup> century theologian Rupert Meldenius. This premise allows for a unifying focused belief with broad and varying points of view. Our denominational constitution details the essentials that unify us. The UCC constitution says: The United Church of Christ acknowledges as its sole Head, Jesus Christ, Son of God and Savior. It acknowledges as **kindred** in Christ all who share in this confession. It looks to the Word of God in the Scriptures, and to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit, to prosper its creative and redemptive work in the world. It claims as its own the faith of the historic Church expressed in the ancient creeds and reclaimed in the basic insights of the Protestant Reformers. It affirms the responsibility of the Church in each generation to make this faith its own in reality of worship, in honesty of thought and expression, and in purity of heart before God. In accordance with the teaching of our Lord and the practice prevailing among evangelical Christians, it recognizes two sacraments: Baptism and the Lord's Supper or Holy Communion. This is specifically what unifies our Christian faith.

The UCC's motto is taken from John 17:21 – "that they may all be one." Everything that we are and all that we do is built upon unity – unifying ourselves as a church and unifying all of creation.

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There is power when we are living in harmony with one another.

- 3 It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion. For there the Lord ordained his blessing, life forevermore.

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<sup>2</sup> Luke 4:18-19

What David was saying through his comparison was that the unity of the people of God—the influence of their unified worship - was a refreshing influence on their nation and the surrounding areas. A dew descending upon the fellowship of God’s people in the local assembly. Despite the natural disharmony that sometimes can happen in community, in our unity we find joy and gladness which rejuvenates us and readies us to face whatever the world sends our way.

Unity is a refreshing influence not only within our church, but it also continues running down the mountain into our community. In the book of Acts, where we find a historical account of the early church, there are these words: “When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting.”<sup>3</sup>

When the believers were of one accord—when they were unified, the Holy Spirit came upon them with power! Later in the same chapter we find the results of this unity. Peter, who earlier denied the Lord Jesus would courageously stand and preach with power and at the end of his message we find these words, “And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, ‘Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.’ So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added. They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Awe came upon everyone because many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.”<sup>4</sup>

Because of the unity of the believers in Jesus, the Holy Spirit empowered them to accomplish great things – “For there the LORD ordained the blessing-- life forever.”

Because of their unity, many came to learn of Jesus and the gospel.

Unity can be difficult. It takes work and commitment. But like most things, with serious engagement and a pure heart, we see the fruits of unity: pleasantness and salvation for ourselves and countless others, growth in our community and the opportunity to serve, the power of the Spirit to achieve the unfathomable, and most importantly, bringing joy to our God.

Amen

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<sup>3</sup> Acts 2:1-2

<sup>4</sup> Acts 2:40-47