

A COMMUNITY OF BROTHERS
Psalm 133

“To dwell above with saints I love, why that will be glory,
To dwell below with saint I know, why that’s another story.”

-Anonymous

Why is it that sometimes the hardest place to get along with people is the church? George McDonald once said that the greatest argument against Christianity is Christians. We can be nasty, we can be petty, we cuss. Some of the most hurt people I know were hurt in the church- oftentimes they expected to be hurt in the world, not in the church.

Yet this psalm says, “Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers live in unity.” Now, the first thing we should clear up is that he’s talking about believers, not just brothers by birth. But do you know what I find really amazing about this? David wrote it. Now, we don’t know when he wrote it, but when you think about the life of David, it’s amazing that he could say this after all the ‘brothers’ in his life who stabbed him in the back. King Saul, supposed to be the the greatest model of a brother in the Lord, tried to kill David. Abner tried to set up Saul’s son as king after Saul died, and started a mini-civil war. Absalom, David’s own son and Ahithophel, his advisor, tried to dethrone David. And on and on with Shimei & Sheba, both of the tribe of Benjamin. All ‘brothers’ in the faith community, yet all guys who backstabbed David. Yet David still says *it’s good* when believers join together.

True Unity Comes From Above

How is this unity good? Let’s look at the metaphors that David uses to artistically describe it. In verse 2a, David gives the image of oil for anointing that is poured on the head and runs down to the beard (this is somewhat analogous to our theology of baptism). In verse 2b, the oil goes from Aaron the high priest’s beard and runs down to the very bottom of his robe. Then we get an analogy that seems to come from left field. In verse 3, the psalmist talks about dew that comes for Hermon. Mount Hermon is a mountain near Jerusalem that stands at about 10,000 feet and is very lush with vegetation year-round partly due to the dew that is frequently present. Zion (Jerusalem) is much lower in elevation and has very little precipitation from May through October. So dew that drifts over from Hermon is quite welcome relief!

Three times here the original Hebrew (the Old Testament was written in Hebrew) says *descended*. The repeated message is that blessing comes from above. It doesn’t depend on us and how we’re feeling, it depends on God and His unchangeable plan. And it’s important to note here: *that’s His plan*. His plan is for us to have unity and to together grow to maturity in Christ. That’s the thrust of Jesus’ prayer in John 17, ‘that they may all be one.’ Did you know that you’re answering Jesus’ prayers when you come and dwell in unity and love?

True Unity Comes to Us In Worship

This is one of a group of psalms entitled the ‘song of ascents.’ Jewish pilgrims were coming from all over, from all walks of life to come to one of the great feasts that happened three times a year in the Jewish community life. They came together to worship and celebrate. This psalm has hints of that worship, but Psalm 134 and many of the surrounding songs of ascent have a strong emphasis on corporate worship.

You know, I used to think that worship was the place for us to come and just experience God and have freedom. Then I'd look at my spiritual life during the week as a test of discipline, how faithfully I could have my quiet time. But I really believe that *I had it backwards*. My personal time with God is the time with I should have freedom. I don't have to impress God or anyone else with how many chapters of the Bible I can read or how disciplined I am at getting up at 5:30. Now, I'm not against daily devotions (much great good comes from learning spiritual discipline), but my point is that we don't have to accommodate anyone in our private worship. In corporate worship, though, we must do things together so that no one gets left behind, so that our voices come together and we learn together. This takes discipline, but it's rewarding.

When we come together we do worship together. That's why from ancient times Christians have called the worship service 'the liturgy' - the work of the people. Worship to be done together. This is why we do confessions and responsive readings together. This is why we will never do communion as an individual exercise, setting it up at different areas of the church to be taken as you 'feel led.' This is why we're going to be moving to a written bulletin in two weeks. We're not necessarily changing what we're doing, we're simply going to make it better and make us more able to worship together.

There's something about worshipping together that fulfills us and unites us for greater things. Our church belongs to an association of churches called Presbytery. We meet 3-4 times a year to plan for united missions efforts, church planting, and the growth and accountability of the ministers. In every meeting, though, we always start with worship. We've got to be the people of God before we can *do the business of the people of God*.

True Unity Comes From Union with Christ

Now you're probably thinking, 'What? How did this have to do with Christ? I can see how you got unity from God and worship but how did you get union with Christ from this Psalm?' Remember, we've been talking about how Christ is found in every text of Scripture, both Old and New Testament. And I think we get some very strong clues in the text.

First, David is talking about Jerusalem. This should be a major giveaway for you budding theologians practicing your Christology (that's a great word, huh?). Verse 3b says, "For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore." Salvation will come in Jerusalem, but would it come through David? Some thought so, after all, he was the greatest of the kings, the one who unified the kingdom of Israel. But he also messed it up big time. You know the story: lust, rape, murder, cover-up... In 2 Samuel it was even prophesied that the sword would not depart from David's house.