

12th Sunday after Pentecost 2023. Psalm 133, Living in Communion

Today we are going to talk about something that is so easy to miss or to misunderstand, that we might not see how fundamentally important it is in our lives of faith, and the source of all the ways God blesses our parish. We mention it often though and proclaim it in every service, 'We are the body of Christ.'

I am talking about unity, oneness of hearts and minds, becoming and being the body of the person of Jesus Christ. The very same oneness, and unified in the same way, that Father, Son and Holy Spirit is one – that is some unity!

Now today's Psalm, Ps 133, is deceptively short, but speaks volumes about this unity and where it comes from.

Ps.133 is a Psalm of Ascents (as are all Psalms 120-134) – a song for going up to a high place.

For the Jewish people, that high place was the temple in the city of Jerusalem. One literally goes up to Jerusalem. The city crowns Mt Zion, and the temple crowns the city. In this exalted place, the highest act was to worship God on the way to and in.

The Jewish people sang Psalm 133 to express their joy in coming together, to ascend the steps of the temple to worship at the temple, where God promised to meet them, as one people of God.

Now God has also promised to bless us and meet us when we come together to worship, just as God promised to meet the Jews through the temple worship. Jesus says "if two or more gather in my name, there am I also" (Mat 18:20).

The key to this blessing though is unity. This beautiful Psalm proclaims oneness in faith and imparts blessing and life to God's people. These are the two linked themes here, abundance and unity, and this morning I'd like us to think of them as liquid and flowing ever downward.

As the Temple in Jerusalem was the high place for the Jewish people, so the cross and resurrection are the high point of the Gospel of Jesus. From here the Gospel spreads around the world. Jesus has risen from the tomb, and he raises us up from unbelief to faith, from death to everlasting life.

Faith in the risen Christ draws people—not only to see things *from* this Easter point of view, but to see things *with* our fellow Christians. The risen Lord creates a new family of those who believe in him and believe it together. "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe," Jesus tells Thomas in John 20:29.

The Gospel flows down freely from the mountain of Easter and makes one family in Christ. The crucified and resurrected Jesus Christ alone unites Christians around the world, not any common points of view we may share. Standing on this high place, we become one in faith, hope and love.

So these blessing of unity and abundance flowing onto and over the church is the great focus of this Psalm. "How very good and pleasant it is when brothers and sisters live together in unity" (v.1).

The word for brothers and sisters here is not the one for blood family, but for the people of God. So this liquid blessing first starts at one Mountain peak, the temple on Mt Zion, cascading over first just a few people, then more and more as it flows out of the temple, out of Jerusalem, through the prophets, and into Christ on the cross and so to us – the people of the new covenant of God.

This living in unity is so fragrant that it is like "precious oil on the head" (v.2). This is the fragrant, refreshing oil used to consecrate a priest, not just any priest, but Aaron, the very first High Priest and founder of Israel's priestly tribe. In Lev. 8:12, "Moses ordained Aaron to the priesthood by anointing his head with oil."

As we spoke about a couple of months ago, we are all the Royal Priesthood, and God is not at all stingy when he anoints us either, just as in today's Psalm. It is poured so generously that it runs over the head, face and collar of all of us. It is a beautiful picture of the unified and serene children of God, enjoying a very good, sweet and pleasant life and glorifying God with it.

For Christians, the oil signifies worship, feasting, celebration in unity. Death separates people, but resurrection promises that we will dwell in unity forever in Christ. God is in the business of bringing the faithful together, a community of saints across time and distance.

The Psalm now moves on to another liquid, the "dew of Hermon" (v. 3).

Mount Hermon is far to the north of Jerusalem, (Mount Zion). Mount Hermon rises above the upper Jordan Valley. It has its share of heavy rainfall and snow. The melting snow, or dew, flows down into the valley becoming the river that fills the sea of Galilee and keeps on going to the oasis of Jericho making it the most fertile part of Israel.

In arid country, where the rain is scarce and the rivers dry up, the land and the people depend on water that comes from a distant source. The dew of Hermon brings life to dry lands and deserts. This is how precious unity is to our Lord.

Like the oil that flows down the beard of Aaron, so the dew of Mount Hermon reaches far beyond its point of origin and gives life to far off places. God's generosity calls people to worship. And in worshiping this God of abundant life and love, we become one family.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ can truly satisfy our thirst for life and love. We thought that life was a scarce commodity, measured out in years and months, days and hours. But Jesus arose and opened the way to eternal life.

We thought that love was reserved for a chosen few, with never enough to go around. But Jesus arose and his word calls forth a global family of believers.

Our Psalm says that it is here, in the unity of the global family of believers, in the unity of the body of Christ, that "the Lord has commanded his blessing, which is life evermore" (v.3). Grace flows down to us and makes us one in faith.

Even though we live in what seems to be prosperous times, there is much conflict in our culture and uncertainty ahead for us, but I think Ps.133 is like living water poured onto dry ground.

This is where we as a parish and a little part of the family of God can shine like beacons by being united. This is also why I speak a bit about not letting little cliques or power groups establish themselves in our parish as they are death!

God's great blessings in and to parishes come from our shared unity in Christ, partakers of the nature of the one who "came to serve, not to be served, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matt 20:28).

Let me pray ...