

Psalm 133

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Preacher: Ryan Spear

[0 : 00] Father, we thank you for this new day. We thank you for your word. We thank you for our life together. In your name I pray. Amen. Please have a seat.

Well, as Jacob mentioned, my name is Ryan Spear. I'm one of the ministers here. It's my privilege to be working with the youth and young adults here at St. John's. My first full-time day was actually July 15th.

So I'm really excited that I get to be coming on board in this way. And I did get some sleep last night. So, yeah, yeah. So we're in a series at St. John's, Summer Psalms.

And this summer our psalms are from a particular part of the Psalter called the Psalms of Ascent. Now, they're called Ascent Psalms because they're literally going up songs.

It's like a road trip playlist for the people of Israel as they would journey up to Jerusalem for major religious festivals. Now, these are prayers for us today that teach us how to walk with God in times of transition.

[1 : 08] So we have our own uphill journey ahead of us here at St. John's as we transition rectors and as we begin to take concrete steps towards finding a more permanent church home.

And Psalm 133 celebrates how good and how pleasant it is when brothers and sisters dwell in unity. And we're going to explore where does this kind of unity come from and what does this kind of unity point to.

See, this psalm is just entirely celebratory. There's no should. There's no must. There's no easy steps here. But we can uncover in this beautiful poem some hints as to where this beautiful celebratory unity comes from and what it points to.

It's the kind of unity that comes from God's special and ongoing presence among us. And it's the kind of unity that gives us just a taste of our ultimate end, the blessing of life forevermore.

All right. So first of all, where does this kind of unity come from? This unity, first of all, comes from sharing a common destination. So verse 1 reads, Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity.

[2 : 30] Now this line was sung by those sharing a common destination. Jerusalem, the mountains of Zion, the place on earth that represented the meeting place between God and humanity.

So they're heading to Jerusalem to worship. So the kind of unity celebrated here is from sharing the same destination, united on the way to worship.

It's the kind of unity that evokes a behold moment, a look. It's like those moments in a long car ride when everyone is still getting along and you almost don't want to mess it up by pointing it out.

This psalm was sung by those who are celebrating their shared destination. It leads me to wonder sometimes if people were to walk into church for the very first time and were to look around the room, I wonder if they look around and say, What in the world does this group of people have in common?

Well, first of all, we're all here to worship the same God. In most other settings or gatherings, we might share some other prominent feature.

[3 : 41] Maybe we are from the same racial or ethnic group, or we live in the same neighborhood, or we go to the same gym. But our destination as Christians is deeper. Now our first Christmas here as a family, this is in 2021.

We're originally from upstate New York. We had moved out here. We knew some people, but not many. But we received an email from someone who said, Hey, would you like to come to our place for Christmas?

Now Christmas is usually an intimate time where you gather with your family or maybe your closest of friends. Now this person who emailed us, we shared a friend in common from upstate New York.

And we shared our faith. But that was it. But the funny thing is, when we got there, it wasn't just us there. We had never met them before. They had also invited a family originally from Ontario, who were also far away from home.

And they had invited a woman from Nigeria, who had been coming to their church and was studying here. And at one point, we were all standing around as our host led us in Christmas hymns.

[4 : 46] And it struck me that there was no other reason for that particular group of people to be together, except for Jesus. And I believe that about this gathering this morning.

Now if we look around, what other reason would we have to be gathered together were it not for Jesus? It's not a unity of biological family or of political identity or of preferences.

It's a unity of purpose. And when unity breaks down in the church, it's often due to a forgetfulness of purpose. Our primary purpose together is to be a worshiping community on a journey together. And this is the first source of the good and pleasant unity worth celebrating. It's from our shared destination, on the way to worship God.

All right. That's the first place this kind of unity comes from. Where's the second? Well, the second, you'll notice in these two striking images, we see this in two similes.

[5 : 51] The two, it is like, it is like images. So first of all, what is going on in these two images? Why is the goodness and pleasantness of unity like oil on the head of Aaron and like dew on Mount Hermon?

So David tells us that the kind of unity that is good and pleasant is like precious oil running down on the beard of Aaron. You know, I thought about bringing a bucket of oil and maybe asking Jacob to come up and demonstrate it.

It just wouldn't fit in my car this morning. But what he's talking about here is an anointing. So we learn about this oil in the book of Exodus and then we see it acted out in the book of Leviticus. It's a really special oil. In fact, it is only to be used in really special worship settings. And it is incredibly aromatic.

We're talking cinnamon, a lemony, gingery smell, like an earthy smell. It would fill the entire room. Sometimes we get a glimpse of this when we walk behind someone wearing maybe a little bit too much cologne.

[6 : 55] But in this instance, it's a smell that would have filled the whole place and connected their collective memories with this image of a high priest. So in these four lines, we have an image pointing to the moment when people saw and smelled the anointing of their mediator.

So when brothers and sisters dwell together in unity, it's like God's special presence has come down among them and is now shared between them.

So that's the first image, the oil on the beard of Aaron. Secondly, the dew of Hermon. This is the tallest mountain in the region. It's in the northern part of that area.

And it was snow-capped, one of the only snow-capped mountains in the area. And the dew that would form there, the condensation that would result overnight, and anyone who's been camping in the mountains knows exactly what this is talking about.

And throughout Scripture, dew is associated with God's ongoing life-generating presence and provision. So he's talking about a really big mountain in the northern part of the kingdom, and then he says it's like this dew falls on Zion.

[8 : 16] And David is basically saying, imagine if the best dew, the largest quantity of dew, fell on Jerusalem. Zion, the place of God's presence, God's ongoing presence.

Nourishing the life of the community. So that's what these two images are evoking. God's special presence among them in the oil of anointing for Aaron, and God's ongoing life-giving provision in the dew of Hermon.

And notice now, this is our second clue as to where the good and pleasant unity David describes comes from. Notice in both images what direction it comes from.

It descends. It comes from above. It's not artificial. It's received from above. It pours down like the oil pouring down.

Aaron's beard and all over his priestly garments. And like the dew, it comes down. It's not a unity they manufacture. It's a unity they receive.

[9 : 20] Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German theologian and pastor in World War II. And he wrote a book, Life Together. It's essentially all about what it looks like to live in a Psalm 133 community.

And he reflected on this in a beautiful way. He said, Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize. It is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate.

Not an ideal that we must realize. A reality created by God in Christ in which we participate. So David is saying this unity is so good and pleasant because it comes from above.

It's received as a gracious gift. It's created by God and we get to participate in it. That's our second point. The good and pleasant unity described here comes from sharing the same destination, worshiping God, and it comes from the descending from above as a gift we receive.

And finally, we're going to close with what this good and pleasant unity points to. It points to life forevermore and the ongoing presence of God in our midst.

[10 : 39] So notice the second theme that cuts across both of the two images. The oil over the beard, the dew on the mountain. It's the idea of the quantity. They are drenched.

Aaron is literally drenched with this oil. The dew of Hermon drenches Mount Zion. So these two images share in the abundance of what is provided.

It's not only a high quality, the most special oil, the highest quality dew. It's high quantity. There's so much oil and so much dew.

This image leads us to what this good and pleasant unity points to. It points to the abundance of life forevermore. David is celebrating not just that people are getting along, not just the absence of conflict, but a foretaste of life forever.

It's those moments we kept glimpses of every once in a while when we're together with other Christians. We have that yearning in our heart that says, wouldn't this just last forever?

[11 : 47] And this morning is one of these opportunities to celebrate this kind of unity. to remember that it comes from our shared destination on the way to worship God.

It descends on us as a gift of the highest quality from above. And it drenches us in the abundance of what life forevermore promises.

And this life forevermore comes to us from the Father, through the Son, by the Holy Spirit. We receive the blessing of the Father poured out in the anointing of His Son, Jesus Christ, forever our High Priest, advocating for us to God the Father, and God the Father for us.

And we're united in the Son. His anointing becomes our unity when we put on Christ. And the Son pours out His Spirit like the dew of Hermon, nourishing His life in and through us.

And each time we gather to worship, to hear God's Word, partake of the Lord's Supper, we participate in the life of Christ, remembering His death for our sake, and receiving ongoing grace for the upward journey together through His Spirit.

[13 : 03] Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity. Amen.