

Redeemer Lutheran Church
August 31, 2025
Unity (Psalm 133)
Pastor Sam Thompson

Psalm 133

*¹ Behold, how good and pleasant it is
when brothers dwell in unity!*

*² It is like the precious oil on the head,
running down on the beard,
on the beard of Aaron,
running down on the collar of his robes!*

*³ It is like the dew of Hermon,
which falls on the mountains of Zion!
For there the Lord has commanded the blessing,
life forevermore.*

Someone has rightly said that nothing good comes from quarrelling and disunity. And 'When God sets out to do something great, He does so by uniting His people in Word, prayer, and one heart and mind.' No wonder one of the key requests in Jesus's high priestly prayer, as recorded in John's gospel chapter 17, is His plea for 'unity among those who believe in Him.'

Today's sermon text, Psalms 133, is a song by David celebrating unity among God's people. This is a popular song that the children of Israel often used when they gathered for religious festivals and family occasions. The immediate context of this Psalm can be found in 2 Samuel 5:1-3, where the children of Israel gather to anoint David as their king. God called Israel to be a light and blessing to the nations. However, their efforts were ultimately thwarted by internal conflicts and disunity. No one was at peace, and the nation was in trouble because of its disunity. But after many years of conflict and infighting, they finally came to Hebron to end their futile hostilities and to make David their king. David immediately recognized this as a significant 'God moment,' and, inspired by the sight of the twelve tribes standing together in unity, the Spirit moved him to write, 'Behold how good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity' (vs. 1).

David begins this Psalm by using two words to describe unity—it's good and pleasant. The word 'good' here carries a moral and ethical meaning, indicating that unity is morally and ethically right. The word 'pleasant' carries the meaning that unity is delightful, something that brings joy to the heart, feels refreshing, renewed, and is beautiful to see.

After establishing that unity is both “Good and Pleasant,” David vividly illustrates how unity embodies these qualities. He employs two metaphors to express this: **oil and dew**. Unity is excellent and pleasant, like the oil poured on Aaron's head. Next, unity is good and refreshing, like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion. What did David mean by comparing unity to the anointing oil and the dew of Hermon?

The oil used to anoint Aaron and his successors was specially made according to God's specifications. When poured on Aaron's head, it spread a sweet fragrance around. This intensely perfumed oil, when poured generously upon Aaron's head, drove away all foul odours and filled the space with its pleasant scent, delighting everyone. David's point is that unity is good and pleasant because, like fragrant oil, it creates a delightful space and atmosphere, brings joy and attracts people near and far.

Unity is a valuable blessing and a wonderful experience for Christians. Nothing draws others to Christ more than the fragrance of Christian unity, and nothing repels them more than division and quarrels. Unity in church or family is always a fragrance God uses to draw others to His love and His Word. This idea is reinforced by the second metaphor, where unity is compared to the dew of Mount Hermon. Mount Hermon is the highest mountain in the Holy Land, located at an elevation of approximately 2,814 meters above sea level. Most of the year, the mountain is covered in dew, creating a breathtaking sight. When David describes unity as being as good and pleasant as the dew of Hermon, he might be thinking about the mountain's magnificent beauty cloaked in dew. A family or church high in unity is a beautiful and pleasing sight, capturing everyone's attention and even drawing in unbelievers. Unity smells good, looks good, and captures everyone's attention.

Secondly, unity is good and pleasant because it is where God's call is heard, and His mission is blessed and prospered. In the Old Testament, oil is used for anointing priests, kings, and prophets. Anointing with oil sets God's chosen people apart for specific tasks. From time to time, kings, prophets, and priests whom God called were anointed with oil to fulfill a special mission. Anointing oil marks their calling and ensures they have God's Holy Spirit to accomplish their given tasks. When David links unity with anointing oil, he means that places of unity are fertile grounds where God's call can be heard. These are sacred spaces where the Holy Spirit unites people's hearts around His Word and Sacraments, godly visions emerge, significant steps of faith are taken, and the desire to advance God's kingdom becomes central to the people's hearts. However, in places where discord and division prevail, no such vision will be seen; no call from God can be heard.

The places of unity are not only where God's call is heard, but also where missions, family, and relationships grow, flourish, and become fruitful. In the Old Testament, dew is often linked to fruitfulness and prosperity. God opens the doors of heaven to shower dew on the land and its yields fruit. When he withdraws dew, the drought comes, and people suffer from famine. (Hag 1:10-11, 14:15, 1 Kings 17). Wherever unity exists, our lives and calling prosper and bear fruit a hundredfold. Verse 3 states, There the Lord ordained his blessing. In other words, God commanded the prosperity and blessing to remain in those places of unity. Unity creates fertile ground in families and churches for God's word to grow, for our callings and vocations to thrive and prosper for His greater glory and for the blessing of all.

Now, at this point, we might ask how we can have this unity. Here, we realize that God does not ask us to create unity in the first place. Unity comes to us from Him. God gives it to us as a Gift. We are only asked to keep and guard it without losing it. This becomes clearer when we understand why David chose Aaron's anointing to illustrate unity. Perhaps the reason is that Aaron's high priestly work served as a unifying factor for Israel as a nation. Once a year, Aaron entered the Most Holy Place of the Tabernacle with the blood sacrifice to atone for the people's sins. In the Old Testament, the foundation for the unity of the children of Israel before God and among themselves was based on this blood atonement. Now, Aaron is the foreshadow of Jesus in the Old Testament. The book of Hebrews reminds us that Jesus is our high priest, and He offered Himself once and for all as a sacrifice for us. Through His precious blood, He bought us and cleansed us from all sin, so that we may belong to Him. Because of this, we are His. And in Christ, 'There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus' (Gal 3:28). We all become one in Him through baptism. Beyond our nationalities, cultures, races, ethnicities, classes, castes, languages, and skin colors, we are made one in Christ. Even if we live in Canada, India, Africa, China, Australia, or Europe, what unites us is that we are all baptised into one Lord and belong to Christ. So 'There is one body, one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.'

We did not do anything to earn this unity. It is a free but costly gift. Because it is costly, Paul also reminds us to "make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit." Please do not break it or lose it. The word used here for 'make an effort' comes directly from the context of gladiator fights in ancient Rome. Gladiators are trained throughout their lives to fight in front of large audiences. When they do fight, if they lose, it often means death or lifelong severe injuries. So, they use all their energy, skills, and mental strength they have gained to overcome their opponent, win, stay alive, and avoid being killed. The phrase 'Make every effort' to maintain the unity spirit means fighting like a gladiator with strength and doing everything possible to

preserve peace and unity. Unity here does not just mean the absence of conflicts or fights but also doing everything we can to understand, resolve, forgive, forget, and move forward so that a positive and constructive atmosphere prevails.

Making every effort also involves honestly acknowledging before God that we need Him in our lives and relationships to heal us, forgive us, work within us, and strengthen us. Without Him, we cannot do anything. God's Holy Spirit is known as the Spirit of Unity. He works to maintain unity among us through various means. Worship means God's service to us. In worship, God comes to us through His word and sacraments. He forgives us, comforts us, nourishes, heals, and strengthens us so that the spirit of unity remains among us.

The unity that God's gift grants us and asks us to maintain is precious because it is both wonderful and good. As David reminds us, it not only has a pleasant aroma but also appears beautiful. It draws even unbelievers and helps them see Jesus more clearly. Unity provides a rich space and atmosphere for people to hear God's call, where lives flourish and are blessed. May God, the Holy Spirit, continue to strengthen, comfort, and supply us with everything we need, so that as we all live in fellowship and unity with God, we reflect that reality in our lives together as fellow Christians. Amen.