



DISCIPLESHIP MINISTRIES
The United Methodist Church

16

Aug

Unity of Praise

Praise Break

TWELFTH SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST, YEAR A

This final week highlights belonging as the heart of praise, drawing on the unity described in the psalms. It invites congregations to embrace practices like singing and prayer that foster connection, reminding us that as we worship together, we grow in belonging—to God and to one another—and offer praise as a shared, communal experience.

REFERENCES

Genesis 45:1-15

Psalms 133

Romans 11:1-2a, 29-32

Matthew 15: (10-20), 21-28

COLORS

Green

Preaching Notes

Focus text: **Psalm 133**

Taking a walk in heavy fog or on days of high humidity results in a fine coating of water as though it has been poured all over you while you walked. The writer of Psalm 133 would argue that you have been blessed. It flows from the heavens until you are covered, soaked in that presence. Reread the second verse of this short psalm with this image of being coated with the moisture of the morning fog. Feel that presence, that blessing. Like the oil on Aaron's head, it runs down, flowing

over from the top of his head into his beard and then onto the collar of his robe. It cannot be contained; it isn't confined to one area, but it flows. And covers. And blesses.

"How very good and pleasant it is," the psalm begins. Good and pleasant. The word translated as "good" in verse one is the same one used in Genesis 1 to declare the state of creation. God saw that it was good. Is there a hint of intentionality here? Is this unity thing that the psalmist describes, the way it was intended? Or is that assuming too much?

Pleasant is often used in tandem with good. But it can be translated as lovely, attractive, friendly, or even joyous. There is exuberance here. So, what is good and pleasant is both intended and beautiful. It is a depiction of the kingdom of God, the kin-dom of human relationship in divine presence. It begins with the family. "How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!" It is a call to be the sign of the kingdom by how we live together as a family unit. There is a mutuality in these kindred groups. There is also attractiveness, which is about hospitality, invitation, and inclusion.

The second verse emphasizes this by comparing the good and pleasant unity with the anointing of Aaron. This was, first of all, priestly anointing. The priest served as the intermediary between God and the people. The priest was the one who brought the people's cares and concerns, joys, and heartaches to the throne of God. By comparing the unity of kinship to Aaron's anointing, the psalmist declares that the family of the people of God are also intermediaries. The blessing is not for them—for us—alone; rather, it runs down, over the beard through which the invitation to praise and presence comes, and over the collar of the robe, which is a symbol of office and of service to the God who calls.

This unity is not simply good and pleasant for its own sake, but for the sake of the world, for the whole kindred of humanity. In addition, the anointing evokes the oil of welcome that the host provides for all who gather in the house. The extravagance of the welcome is in the oil that flows far beyond initial blessing. It is not placed on the head but poured so that it runs over— an example of radical and extravagant hospitality. The call is to go above and beyond in our desire to make everyone feel welcome in the family.

The above-and-beyond theme continues in verse three. Now, it is dew that refreshes the earth, dew that flows from Hermon to Zion. That's quite a flow! Hermon is in the north, and the dew would have to flow hundreds of miles to get to Zion. So, it must be hyperbole. Pretty, but pretty impossible. Unless, unless. What if the image of the family, the kindred that lives together in unity, is now all-inclusive? And Zion is blessed by the strengthening of the peoples who live north of the

nation? What if it isn't about nations any longer, but about people everywhere being gathered up into the family of God, the people who acknowledge the value and worth of all.

While the dew may not have made it all the way from Mount Hermon down to Mount Zion, it did provide sustenance for the surrounding area. In an area with little rainfall, dew is life-giving. It is a blessing and a necessity for life to flourish in the region.

The psalm invites us to imagine unity that goes beyond borders, crossing boundaries and divisions. It invites us to see praise as a unifying force, something that brings us together. It's not a way of saying our God is better than your God, but that living in creation is a gift worthy of praise. Gratitude and acknowledgement of the source of our living can be an act of hospitality and blessing for all.

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