

Dwelling Together in Unity

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Our scripture reading this morning is found in the epistle of Paul to the Ephesians. We read Ephesians 4, the first 16 verses and that in connection with Psalm 133. Today being the day that we celebrate Pentecost, we notice the reference to the unity of the Spirit in verse 3 of this passage. I'll make mention of the work of the Spirit also in the sermon. Ephesians 4, beginning at verse 1.

1 I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, 2 With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; 3 Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. 4 There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; 5 One Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all. 7 But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ. 8 Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. 9 (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? 10 He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)

And that "all things" refers to the body, he might fill the members of the body. Verse 11,

11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; 12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: 13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: 14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; 15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: 16 From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

That far we read in God's holy inspired word. May God bless that word to our hearts.

The text that we consider this morning is Psalm 133. Psalm 133.

1 [A Song of degrees of David.] Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! 2 It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments; 3 As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.

Beloved congregation in our Lord Jesus Christ, I chose to preach this sermon on dwelling together in unity with the thought of joy that we have had to dwell together in unity with you as a congregation, but also with reference to Pentecost, acknowledging that dwelling together is the work of the Spirit. The Spirit that was poured out on Pentecost, that sound of the mighty rushing wind doing the work of the Spirit, that's the way the Spirit works, working wherever he wants, however he wants, and nothing can stop that work of the spirit the Spirit. The Spirit works to bring unity in the church.

The tongues as of cloven fire, that fire the picture being the purification that the Spirit accomplishes in the church, purging our hearts, bringing us more and more into unity. And that too is the picture of the many different languages that were spoken, all the different languages of the earth. The Spirit works to bring the church into that body of Christ from every corner of the earth where God has his elect. That's the work of the Spirit.

The text reminds us of the great blessing that God gives to us in joining us together as the body of Christ, but when David points to that great blessing of being brought together as a body, that points to the greater blessing of being united to God himself. When David points to the blessing of being united as brethren, he also has in view the fact that we have been united and brought into covenant fellowship with our God. So to celebrate the one, to celebrate the unity of brethren, is to celebrate covenant fellowship with our God.

Psalm 133 is one of those Psalms called "A Song of degrees." You find that from Psalm 120 all the way through Psalm 134, all of those Psalms are grouped together, and they're called "A Song of degrees," or another translation of that title would be "A Song of Ascents." Commentators are not absolutely sure why all of those Psalms are labeled "A Song of degrees." There are certainly differences of opinion concerning that, but one of the ideas that stands out and that fits is that these Psalms were sung as the children of Israel made their pilgrimage three times a year to the great feasts, they would make their pilgrimage to Jerusalem and as they made that pilgrimage up to Jerusalem as they ascended, they would sing these Psalms. And there are certainly references to Jerusalem, Psalm 122 being one of them. And another one of the themes that stands out in these Psalms is the faithfulness of God in preserving his church in the midst of the world. And so you find the theme also of the antithesis and the church existing in the midst of the

world, but one of the blessings that God gives to his church in the midst of the world as he gathers his church out of the world, is the blessing of dwelling together as brethren. So I want to use that theme this morning "Dwelling Together in Unity." Let's first note the meaning of that. Secondly, the source, and that would be the work of the Holy Spirit. And lastly, the significance of dwelling together in unity.

One of the remarkable truths about the church is found in that reference to us as brethren. That's the way David refers to us in the Psalm. The text says, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" And no doubt it is a lovely thing in families for brothers and sisters in families to dwell together. It's a lovely thing when children of the same parents dwell together in unity. We live in a day and age in our world when that can hardly be taken for granted. But the text is not talking about regular families, not first of all, the text is talking about brethren in Zion. Verse 3 talks about dew on the mountains of Zion, and Zion is the name for the church. Zion is that fortress of mountains that surrounds Jerusalem where God put his temple.

So, brethren refers to brethren in the church of Jesus Christ. Brethren are not merely then descendants, and when David wrote the Psalm, he wasn't just thinking of all those who were descendants of Abraham, blood relatives. There were Pharisees in Jesus' day who claimed to be descendants of Abraham, and Jesus says to them, "Ye are of your father the devil. You are not children of God, you are not brethren." Brethren are Abraham's spiritual descendants. You and I are, brethren because we have the same faith as our father Abraham. We are brethren because we have been purchased by the blood of Jesus Christ, purchased with the blood of our elder brother. Brethren, because the Holy Spirit has given to us the life of Christ, our elder brother. Brethren, because we have been adopted by the Spirit into the family of God. When we have Christ as our elder brother, then we are brethren.

David celebrates not just existing together, they're not just existing in an abstract way, brethren that are on different corners of the planet, but brethren dwelling together. Not just being together in the same place, you can have that sometimes in families, you can have husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and sisters, they all live under the same roof but they live their own separate lives. Not that kind of dwelling together, and you can have that sometimes in the church too where you have members who twice on the Lord's Day come and are under the same roof, but the rest of their lives basically live, they live to themselves. Not that kind of dwelling together. David celebrates a dwelling together, that is, a living together, operating together in unity. That's what the psalmist rejoices in. That's what you and I rejoice to see as well, living and communing together as brethren.

We could translate the Psalm this way, "How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell even in unity." And the idea that the psalmist stresses when he begins the Psalm with that word, "Behold," to say, "Look at this. Here is something wonderful. Here's something amazing, brethren dwelling together in unity." And children, you recognize in that word unity is the word unit. Dwelling together in unity implies that we dwell together as a single unit. That's what the apostle stresses in that passage that we read in

Ephesians when he speaks of the body of Christ. Ephesians 4:4, 5 and 6 he says, "There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in 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 you all." The apostle is talking about one unit brought together as many different members into one body, operated on, as our bodies are, by one brain. One brain sends out its signals to the whole, all the different members of the body. The body of Christ is infused, if you will, operated on by one Spirit who works in the whole body. One Spirit, even as we are called in one hope. When the Spirit joins us into that one body, he gives us the same hope, the hope of glory, the hope of fellowshiping together in glory with our elder brother and with all the saints.

One Lord to whom we submit in obedience. One baptism. One God and Father of all. There's a unity that God gives to the body, gives us a certain unity, joins us together in one unit, but then of course, if we speak of the body, we can't separate that from the idea of the body all working together, all the different members of the body, not just the hand living off over in that corner and the eye over in that corner and the foot over there, but all the body working together, being united in one faith, having the same faith, believing the same things that God reveals in scripture, believing what God tells us about our misery and our salvation in Jesus Christ, then, that saves us out of our misery and believing what God tells us concerning the duty of thankfulness.

But now that one body operates together and so we have again in Ephesians thinking of the body, the eye doesn't say, "I don't need the hand." All the body understands that we need all the members of the body working together. Verse 16, "From whom," and this is speaking of Christ and through the operation of the Spirit, "From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted," brought together, "compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." Unity, the unity that the Spirit works implies the whole body working together, bound together in love. That's what the psalmist is talking about when he speaks of the unity of the body. Living and working together with the same goal. Living and working together to encourage one another, to help one another in time of need. What a wonderful thing to see, beloved, all working together ultimately to bring praise to our God.

"How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" I realize that we have only a small beginning as regards the expression of that unity, but it is a reality and we do see it so that we can say about Grace Protestant Reformed Church, "How good and how pleasant it is for brethren of Grace Protestant Reformed Church to dwell together in unity!" The source of that unity, of course, is not ourselves because if we were left to ourselves. of God had not given to us his Spirit, we wouldn't have any concern for the brethren at all. and no concern for the head of the body to give glory to our head, Jesus Christ. We would have no concern at all for that. If we had been left to ourselves, if we had not been gathered into the body, then we would be living in our own little corner just for ourselves, only seeking our own things and not the things of others.

We are not the source of this unity in the body. The Spirit is the source and the psalmist points to that truth that unity and that blessing of unity begins outside of ourselves by two figures in our Psalm. The first figure that he uses is the figure of oil, that anointing oil that was poured on the head of Aaron, Aaron the high priest. So David speaks of that ointment being poured on top of Aaron's head. That anointing that was authoritative that God would give to his office-bearers in the Old Testament, that pictured the authority that that office-bearer was given, but also the equipping of that office-bearer to do his work. So that the anointing oil pictured the Holy Spirit. And the work of the Holy Spirit, now think of that, anointing oil, it was a fragrant oil infused with special spices that could not be used anywhere else but only in the anointing oil. Well, when that anointing oil was poured on the high priest, that sweet smell would go with him, as it were, wherever he went as he performed his holy duty. And so the picture of that anointing oil was the equipping of the office-bearer to go about his duties with gladness. So we read in Hebrews that oil is called the oil of gladness. But all that's a picture of the Spirit who makes us glad to serve.

Now think of that precious ointment, the anointing that was poured out on Aaron's head. Aaron was the high priest who was a picture of Jesus Christ. Now the anointing was first poured on our head, Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ, who came who took upon himself human flesh was anointed by the Spirit without measure and who went about the duties of his calling with gladness. He took upon himself that office with gladness. He went about all his ministry willing to suffer his whole life and go to the death of the cross and earn for us by his death the forgiveness of sins, and earn for us the blessing of the Holy Spirit so that the anointing oil that is poured on the head doesn't stop with the head but the anointing oil drips down all the way to the skirts, drips down over the whole body. And now you see the picture, the Holy Spirit given to the head, that Holy Spirit also is poured out upon the church, the body of Christ, so that we are partakers of that anointing. But it starts with the head. The body doesn't go up and take the oil to itself, but the oil is poured out and flows on the head and then to the rest of the body. And that's why the unity that the apostle refers to in Ephesians is called the unity of the Spirit because the Spirit is the source.

That's the first picture that the psalmist gives of the work of the Spirit, that anointing oil, that fragrant oil, but then the second picture that the psalmist uses is the picture of dew that descends upon Mount Hermon. When moisture would blow off of the Mediterranean Sea, that moisture would blow up and then up into the mountains and there on Mount Hermon that moisture would settle out of the air on Mount Hermon. And children, you know what would happen when that dew would fall on Mount Hermon day after day, Mount Hermon would flourish with all that gentle dew settling out on that mountain day after day, it would flourish with green vegetation. And there's the picture when God pours out his Holy Spirit, he pours it gently, not like a violent torrential storm that causes all kinds of damage, not that way but a gentle dew that settles out.

The picture is up on Mount Hermon, but then David immediately switches over to Mount Zion, as the dew of Hermon and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion. So now he takes that picture and he switches it over to the church and when that

Spirit descends gently upon the church, what happens, children? What happens? The church flourish. There's the fruits of the Spirit. That's why you see the fruits of the Spirit in the church. That's why you see those fruits that are described, love and joy and peace and longsuffering, and gentleness and goodness. That's why you see meekness and faith and temperance. All those things are fruits of the Spirit as the dew descends upon the mountains of Zion.

You see, we are not the source of the unity in the church. The Holy Spirit works that unity. When we say that the Spirit is the source, we don't just mean that the Holy Spirit makes his grace available or simply makes his blessing available so that that blessing is out there but then we have to go and acquire that blessing for ourselves. David is stronger than that. It's not just that blessings are available, what does he say in the text when he speaks about the dew of Hermon and the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion? He says, "For there the Lord commanded the blessing." The Lord commanded the blessing. In the first place, notice it is the Lord Jehovah, the great "I Am," the sovereign God who is absolutely above the creature who does whatever he desires to do. Our faithful covenant God, he is the one who commands the blessing in this way, just as the Lord commanded, "Let there be light," and there was light. "Let the earth bring forth grass," and it did.

The Lord commands the blessing and therefore when he commands it, there will be a blessing, and now we're not taking, separating that from the means of how God brings about that blessing in the congregation. He uses means, he uses the preaching of his word. He uses the encouragement that, brethren give to one another. He doesn't just zap everybody so that automatically there's this unity that just exists. No, he uses means. He uses Bible studies. He uses all the members of the body caring for one another. But he still is the one who accomplishes it ultimately using the means.

The Lord commands the blessing. What is that blessing that he commands? The blessing is defined in our text, "For there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore." Children, what is the opposite of life? Death. The opposite of life that the psalmist is describing is that death of being separated from God, to live apart from God is death. Well, this life forevermore is speaking of the life of covenant fellowship. The whole Psalm is speaking about that dwelling together, covenant fellowship with God's people, but especially with God himself. We have life, that life of fellowship.

When Jehovah commands the blessing, then we will certainly experience that covenant fellowship. And now I mention the certainty of it. When God blesses, it will certainly come. You'll remember the story of Balak when he wanted Balaam to come and curse Israel, and even that false prophet, even Balaam understood that when God blesses there's nothing that can reverse that blessing. And so we have these words of Balaam in Numbers 23:20, "Behold, I," that is, Balaam, "I have received commandment to bless: and he," that is, God, "he hath blessed; and I cannot reverse it." Nothing can reverse the commandment of God to bless his people. Nothing will stop Jehovah from blessing us.

Why is that? Well, because Jesus Christ has purchased all those blessings for us and there's nothing that is going to stop him from applying to his church, to his body all the blessings that he has already purchased. He has earned those blessings for us and Christ in heaven prays that you and I would receive those blessings. And one of those blessings is the unity of the brethren. He prays that you and I would experience all the blessings of salvation.

God is the source of our blessed unity. How does God give that blessing? We spoke, alluded to the means before. It's significant that these blessings are given in connection with the church. That's what David expresses in verse 3 of our text when he speaks of first the precious ointment, then the dew that descended on the mountains of Zion, and then he says, "for there," upon the mountains of Zion, there in Zion, "for there the LORD commanded the blessing." In Zion. Not now, of course, that location over in the Middle East but in the church, in connection with the church. There the Lord commanded the blessing. Within the fortress. That was a picture of Zion, those mountains within the fortress of Zion, so that someone who thinks to themselves, "I can experience all those blessings, all those blessings of salvation, and I don't need the church," they're fooling themselves. Sometimes people have that idea, I've had it in the past, people calling me from other churches who were not members of, not local members, they said they worshiped with some church that was well, this was up in Canada, they were in Canada, they said, "Well, we watch online. We watch this church in Texas." And they wanted me to baptize their infant, which I didn't do. But here were people that thought they could simply watch online. They had their Bibles. Didn't need a local body where they worshiped together. Someone who thinks that way, beloved, is forgetting that God commands his blessing in Zion. So if someone barely darkens the door of the church and who lives in willing isolation, now sometimes it's not possible for God's people to gather with the saints and God gives grace in those circumstances too through the body, but someone who lives in willing isolation, they should not expect the blessings of the covenant to flow upon them. God himself ties his blessing to the church.

And then we can understand a passage like 1 John, 1:3. The apostle John says, "That which we have seen and heard," of the gospel and of Jesus Christ, "That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us." He's speaking about fellowship in the body. And then notice how he goes on to tie that with fellowship with God, "that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." That's how God works. He brings us into the fellowship of the church, that within the church as he saves us into the church, there we experience fellowship with God. In the church we are able, by God's grace, by the Spirit operating, we are able to experience that communion.

I want to read that verse again in Ephesians 4:16. "From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love." God saves us into the church so that we can serve one another and build one another up unto the edifying of itself in love. That's why he brings us together so that we can nourish and strengthen one another.

So now the question. How precious, how precious is the body to you, beloved? How precious is the body to me, I ask myself. Do we confess with David, "How good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" Do you see the great benefit and do you see the great beauty of brethren dwelling together in unity? David says how good and we can take that word good in the broadest sense. How good it is when you partake of good food. That good food is nourishing. Well, when brethren dwell together in unity, it is good when we nourish one another. Good food nourishes and strengthens. A good shelter protects when storms come. How good to be part of the body that we might help one another when storms come. How good to dwell together in the church. How good to hear the preaching of God's word to us. How good to have our faith strengthened by the preaching and by the administration of the sacraments. And how good for us as brethren to edify one another.

But not just good in this way, we could talk about cough and cold medicine that's good for you. But when I take a spoonful and I haven't done that for a long time, but when I take a spoonful of cough medicine, I think this is good for me, but when I put it in my mouth and swallow it down, it's not very pleasant. Not good in that way. That's not the way the psalmist would have us think of how good it is to dwell together. Well, we can dwell together in unity, but it's so unpleasant. That's not the picture. He says, how good and pleasant. And now you can think of all kinds of pictures of pleasant things. You see a beautiful sunset and you say, "What a beautiful picture." The unity of the brethren is beautiful, dwelling together in the church is a beautiful thing. Or we see a beautiful flower and you smell the sweet smell. When we visit with one another, how good and how pleasant when we leave one another's presence and we say how pleasant that was to fellowship together.

That's what David is thinking of. How good and how pleasant for brethren to dwell together in unity. That confession, beloved, implies a calling. He doesn't give any commands in the text but when he says how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity, that implies a calling, and that calling is that we are to give ourselves to seek the unity, to seek to manifest the unity that is ours. Yes, we have it, but we are called to manifest that unity more and more. That's the idea of the apostle in Ephesians, endeavoring, he says, to keep the unity of the Spirit. Endeavoring and the idea is giving ourselves diligently to promote that unity. That's the means that the Spirit uses.

We ought to seek, that's the implied calling, that in the first place, but in the second place when the psalmist says how good and how pleasant it is, that implies a calling to give thanks. Give thanks to God. I give thanks and my family gives thanks for that unity that is so precious. Give thanks to God for making us part of the brethren. Give thanks to God for his mercy to us as a congregation. Amen.

Our Father which art in heaven, we thank thee for the unity of the brethren. How good and how pleasant it is to see the fruit of thy Spirit in our midst. We confess that we have but a small beginning and yet we rejoice to see where thou hast worked. Bless, O Lord,

this congregation. Grant that more and more we would manifest that unity to the glory of thy name. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.