

Thought for the Week 16th August 2020

Imagine that you are part of a United Nations peace keeping force sent into a war-torn country on a peace keeping mission. Your group is made up of people from different countries, different ethnic groups, different backgrounds, different beliefs - not all even believe in a Democratic Government. All are there on a single mission and to be successful, the group must all work together to establish its goal and bring peace to the country.

However, each one must lay aside his or her preferences, ideas and wants, if they are to be successful. If everyone wanted to be in charge or wanted everything their own way, the mission would be a mess. It would be doomed to fail. In other words, there must be Unity which is defined as: the state or quality of being one; singleness or the state or quality of being in accord. Unity must be harmony of thought, of purpose, of focus, of direction.

If you think about it - the Church should be like a peace keeping force in a war-torn world. If the Church is made up of people from different nations, different ethnic groups, different backgrounds, not all believing exactly the same things, then it must work together to establish its goals. Each must lay aside his or her preferences, ideas and wants, if they want to be successful. If everyone had to be in charge or wanted everything their own way, then the mission would be a mess. It would be doomed to fail.

Obvious, isn't it? There must be Unity!

Psalm 133 give us biblical reasons why Christians should dwell together in unity in the Local Church.

Psalm 133 A song of ascents. Of David.

¹ How good and pleasant it is
when God's people live together in unity!

² It is like precious oil poured on the head,
running down on the beard,
running down on Aaron's beard,
down on the collar of his robe.

³ It is as if the dew of Hermon
were falling on Mount Zion.
For there the LORD bestows his blessing,
even life for evermore.

First of all Christians should dwell in unity because it is good (v.1)

It is good for the growth of the Church and for the growth of Christians and it is good for others. It is good for the world to see Christians in unity and it is good for others of different faiths to see Christians in unity.

You know how it is when a child gets something others don't have. Other kids are drawn to that one. They want to have the same thing. I suppose the same thing happens when the latest iPhone comes out! When Christians get along with each other, and when others see love and harmony practised in the church, then they are drawn to us. They will want to have what we have.

Verse one also says that Christians should dwell in unity because it is pleasant. The dictionary defines pleasant as "giving a sense of happy satisfaction or enjoyment." A pleasant person is "friendly, considerate and likeable." Christians in unity in the church is pleasant to God. It is pleasant to Ministers and leadership and to fellow Christians. And, of course, by extension will also be pleasant to others.

In verse 2 the psalmist uses a couple of illustrations which seem a bit strange to us. The precious oil which was used to anoint Aaron as the first high priest (see Exodus 29) was a mixture of several strong spices: myrrh, cinnamon, calamus, and cassia, blended together in a base of Olive Oil. Even in that respect it is a picture of unity. One commentator puts it like this: *In Scripture, Olive Oil is used as a symbol of God's Holy Spirit. The Olive Oil blends these spices together in the way that God can blend us together. In other words: Humans tend to be what you could call ... spicy. Our various strong flavours can clash with each other. Only the Oil of God's Spirit can blend us together.*"

Notice that it wasn't just a drop of oil that was used – he was drenched with it – running down his beard and under his collar. If we are going to maintain UNITY in the Church, we don't need just a little droplet of the Holy Spirit. We need a good drenching. We need God's Spirit to pour down over us and cover us completely.

1 Peter 4:8 says "Above all love each other deeply because love covers over a multitude of sins". In the same way, God's Spirit can pour over us and cover those rough edges of sin that make us rub each other up the wrong way. Only God's Spirit can give us the Grace to overlook each other's faults so that we can live together in good and pleasant Unity. And when that happens, the whole world will take notice.

When Aaron stood there with the Anointing Oil running off his head and flowing down his garments, the whole temple was filled with the scent of sacred perfume. The aroma was inescapable. Everyone noticed it. When we come together as a church, the sweet smell of unity *should* fill the building. If it does, that aroma will not be contained here. It will flow out and fill the Community around us. And people will be drawn to Christ by sweet aroma of Unity.

The second word picture in Psalm 133 is that Unity is like DEW. The psalmist says it is as if the dew of Mount Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. Mt Hermon is an impressive landmark that stand out against the dry plains North of Jerusalem. Its lofty heights provide cooling winds and refreshing summer mists. The Dew of Mount Hermon (which is heavy enough to saturate the dry ground) comes only after a still, quiet night. Tranquility is needed for this Dew to form. This gives us another picture of the work of the Holy Spirit. Unity descends, like Dew, as a gift from God. Our part is to ask and receive this gift.

Unity of Christians, unity in the church, unity in local fellowships. What a wonderful picture! Yes unity is good and pleasant and often RARE! Sadly unity 's not the picture we always see.

It's probably not sung very much as it may be considered not to be very "politically correct" these days, but Sabine Baring-Gould's hymn, "Onward Christian Soldiers" has the verse the goes:

*Like a mighty army moves the Church of God;
brothers, we are treading where the saints have trod;
we are not divided, all one body we,
one in hope and doctrine, one in charity,*

Someone has parodied it to say something which is, sad to say, nearer to the truth!

*Like a might tortoise moves the Church of God,
brothers, we are treading where we've always trod;
we are all divided, many bodies we,
very strong on doctrine, weak in charity.*

Too often you hear about power-struggles between Christians. But POWER is not our goal. Our goal and our calling from God is UNITY. It is UNITY that pleases God not power, not success, not size, not clever programmes. That's why the early church rejected all the normal ways of "getting organized." They rejected Totalitarianism: absolute authority in the hands of a Dictator. They rejected Anarchy: complete individualism where it's "everyone for themselves." They even rejected what we call Democracy - ie majority rule.

Instead of these models, the early church practised what could be best called "Spirit-directed Unity." Richard Foster does a good job of describing "Spirit-directed Unity" in his book, *Celebration of Discipline*. He writes, *"Unity rather than majority is the principle of corporate guidance. More than mere agreement, it is the perception that we have heard the voice of God. ... We do not seek compromise, but God-given consensus."*

That's how we should make decisions in the Christian Church. We ask God to guide us, and we look for God-given consensus so that we can go forward in UNITY. God wants our churches to be a true UNITY COMMUNITY. One Pastor of a growing church has put it this way, *"The secret of church growth rests on three things: love God, love each other, and love the lost."*

People are not going to be drawn to a Church that is filled with squabbling, quarrelling, complaining people. People are drawn to the Lord when they enter a Church and smell the sweet aroma of Unity.

The psalm ends with a reminder of the result of unity – "there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore."

Let us pray that the Lord will send his blessing as we unite together in his service.