

Psalm 133-134

Theme: Brotherhood: It's not a dream, it's a reality!

- 1) *Consider its source and beauty.*
- 2) *Consider its service and praise.*

<sup>NIV</sup> **Psalm 133:1** *A song of ascents. Of David. How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity! <sup>2</sup> It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes. <sup>3</sup> It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.* <sup>NIV</sup> **Psalm 134:1** *A song of ascents. Praise the LORD, all you servants of the LORD who minister by night in the house of the LORD. <sup>2</sup> Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and praise the LORD. <sup>3</sup> May the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth, bless you from Zion.*

Tomorrow is Martin Luther King Jr. Day. He was a man who dreamed of a brotherhood among men – a dream in which humans of any gender, race, age or any other difference, might be united as a family.

Many others before Dr. King had this same dream. Poets, philosophers, and philanthropists - both ancient and modern – have written about the utopian brotherhood of man. And don't we also wish for peace and unity among all people? But, why hasn't it become a reality. Why are there still wars, racism, hatred and crime?

The simple answer to this question is: sin. Humans are evil - and their actions prove it. The peace most people want is peace for themselves and on their "own" terms. Think about that for a second. Is unity on MY terms and according to MY standards true unity? No, it is selfishness.

Will there ever be a brotherhood of man on this earth? Where there is sin, there is discord - so the logical answer would be no. But wait. I know of a place where this dream of peace is a reality. I know of a kingdom, whose citizens strive for brotherhood with true results! Where is this place? It is the Holy Christian Church, the invisible kingdom of all true believers, who are united by faith with God and all believers from every nation under heaven. Let us consider the unity we have in the Church, under the theme: **Brotherhood: It's not a dream, it's a reality!** 1) *Consider its source and beauty.* 2) *Consider its service and praise.*

Part One: Consider its source and beauty.

Now, I know someone might immediately object and say, "How can you say that there is perfect unity in the Church? Culture clashes and quarrels seem to pop up all the time between black and white, old and young, male and female. Even in our own congregation's past there have been bitter conflicts between people that have gotten downright nasty."

To answer this objection, let me qualify what I mean by Church. When I talk about the Holy Christian Church, I am not talking about the Lutheran Church, the Wisconsin Synod, or even Immanuel in Kewaunee. I am talking about true believers, whom only God knows. These are they who have been led by the Spirit to recognize and repent of all their sins – looking to God to forgive them for Christ's sake. And God does forgive them. His Son's sacrificial death has paid for every one. On top of that, God credits Jesus' righteousness as their own – not counting a single sin against them. They are holy in God's sight because of their faith in Jesus.

Remember what I said about unity being impossible because of sin? But in the Holy Christian Church, sin is done away with in Christ. Since sin has been forgiven, unity is possible: a brotherhood under Christ. All believers in Jesus, regardless of our race, sex, or age, all belong to the same family: that of God.

Now, this is a wonderful concept, but where is the reality? First of all, our spiritual union, though unseen, is no less real. It is not fake. Secondly, the Church strives to show this reality as a testimony to the world. The visible Church, a synod or congregation like Immanuel, is not perfect. We still have a sinful nature on this earth; and sin tries to destroy our fellowship with each other. But all of us also have Jesus' blood covering us! All sin has been forgiven. We are united with Christ. Because of who we are and what we possess in Christ, we are able to forgive each other. We are able to work towards actual Christian unity.

Consider what a blessing unity is in the Church. Our first Psalm describes it: *How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!* <sup>2</sup> *It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes.*

Psalm 133 was sung by the Jews as they went to Jerusalem for one of the great festivals. How they looked forward to meeting their family of believers, and worshipping their God together with them.

Aaron, the first High Priest, was God's representative to the people, and the people's representative to God. The fragrant anointing oil poured out on him might be thought of as symbolizing the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Church. Think of the pleasant aroma. Think of what the anointing meant: that Aaron was God's chosen servant. In the New Testament Church all believers are God's chosen servants, his royal priests to the world. We have been anointed with the Holy Spirit in Baptism. *We are to God the aroma of Christ before the world (2 Corinthians 2:15).*

Our Psalm refers to our Christian brotherhood *as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion.* Mount Hermon is the highest mountain in Israel. It is the only place that has snow all year round. Imagine living in hot, dry Israel. The thought of heavy, cool mountain dew is very refreshing. And so is brotherhood and unity in the Church! How refreshing it is to have brothers and sisters of diverse backgrounds united with us in the same faith! What joy there is in learning from each other. The older members in our congregation have fascinating stories and the wisdom of experience to share with the younger ones; if they would only listen. The younger members have energy, ideas and optimism that the older members can enjoy if they would only allow it. Men and women have been given unique talents – and how refreshing it is when men and women work together with instead of against each other in their God-given roles. Refreshing unity is here in the Church. And why?

*For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.* The reason for refreshing unity is Christ. He united us with God, and broke down the dividing wall that separated us from each other (Ephesians 2:14). It is the LORD who bestows the blessing of forgiveness. It is the LORD who bestows peace and unity. And this unity with Him is life forevermore.

In his revelation, St. John was given a wonderful glimpse of the brotherhood that the saints in heaven now enjoy: *After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: "Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb (Revelation 7:9-10)."* What a beautiful picture of heaven. And we, by faith, are united with those brothers and sisters of ours. How good and pleasant it will be when we experience that unity in heaven. How good and pleasant it is for us now to strive for that unity here in the Church, to the service and praise of God, as our next psalm reminds us.

Part Two: Consider its service and praise.

Psalm 134 reads: *Praise the LORD, all you servants of the LORD who minister by night in the house of the LORD.* <sup>2</sup> *Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and praise the LORD.* <sup>3</sup> *May the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth, bless you from Zion.* This psalm was probably sung responsively between the people and the priests in the temple. The people encouraged the priests to serve the Lord with praise. The priests encouraged the people to lift their hands in prayer. They were mutually encouraged that the LORD, the maker of heavens and earth, who promised them the Savior, would bless them.

Our brotherhood that we experience in the Church has a purpose: praising God. God has made all of us servants in his temple. Spreading the Gospel is not only your pastor's job. No, this is our ministry.

Saint Peter says: *But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light (1 Peter 2:9).* God has made all of us his royal representatives. He has given us each unique gifts and talents to use for this service. With our varied gifts and talents we all form one body, and with this body we minister to our community, and praise the LORD.

There is a sad fact: many people come to Church only for what they can get out of it. Yes, they talk about fellowship and unity, but only if that unity and fellowship suits their particular tastes. In my ministry, I have heard my share of people leaving a congregation because, as they say: "This Church isn't really doing anything for me."

First of all, the Church is always doing something for me. The Church offers me God's lifesaving Gospel. The Church administers the sacrament – and with it the assurance of salvation. I find my true, spiritual family in the Church. These reasons alone are more than enough to make me cling to true teaching Church no matter how frustrated I feel about the ministry of a

particular congregation. On top of this, Christ does not want us to look at fellow members in annoyance, but with forgiveness. Christ says: <sup>34</sup> "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. <sup>35</sup> By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34-35)

Our attitude should not only be one of "what I get out of Church," but also "what do I have to give to the Church." It should not be how people respect me, but how do they respect God. It should not be how I can be loved, but how I can exercise my love and forgiveness – being so greatly loved and forgiven by God himself!

One of the Christian's greatest joys of being part of a congregation of believers is not in the getting, but in the giving. Now I am not merely talking about money. I am talking about talents. What talent do you have that you can praise God with? Maybe you are very handy, and can fix almost anything. Maybe you have a lot of time to pray. Maybe you're great at teaching. Maybe you are a friendly person and can welcome people warmly. We all have talents, time or personality traits that we can use to God's glory in service for the congregation. Church is not only what we get out of it, but also what we give.

Let me tell you a little secret: the more you give of yourself to the work of the Church, the more you will get out of the brotherhood of believers. Through your service, you will find yourself rejoicing more in the blessings that God your Savior has given you. The more you encourage, the more you are encouraged and find joy in your Church.

I want you all to do something. Look at each other. Look across the rows. What do you see? Your brothers and sisters! How much do you know about them? How much do they know about you? You might have a word for them that could really help them with something that they are struggling with. They might have a word to encourage you with. Talk to your brothers and sisters after church. Rejoice with them in your God. Make plans together on how our church can be a close-knit family and a light to our community.

Brotherhood. To many it is an unattainable dream. To us, in the Church, it is a reality. Let us always recognize the source of our unity: Jesus. Let us always rejoice in its beauty. Let us consider its service and praise to God. Let us not fall out of the habit of meeting together. When you are tempted to miss Church, think about what you are tempted to miss: the brotherhood of believers, the smiles of God's people, songs of praise to the Lord, and the Lord's smile upon us. "Dear Lord, keep us always in this unity and brotherhood of believers. Keep us always as members of your family. Use us to help our family. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen."