

Unity of Praise

August 16, 2026

Psalm 133

¹Look at how good and pleasing it is when families live together as one! ²It is like expensive oil poured over the head, running down onto the beard — Aaron's beard! — which extended over the collar of his robes. ³It is like the dew on Mount Hermon streaming down onto the mountains of Zion, because it is there that the Lord has commanded the blessing: everlasting life.



As we begin today, I invite you into the joy and abundance of Psalm 133. To draw you in, I begin with a similar example. Please close your eyes. Now, think back to a Christmas when the kids were small and you were gathered with family. It's Christmas morning and the presents have been opened. The kids are sitting on the floor, playing with new toys or trying on new clothes. You and the other adults are sitting around, drinking coffee and chatting. There is a happiness, a joy, a deep sense of family and belonging in the room. Can you feel it?

Or maybe it is like that moment when you are once again with a great friend that you have not seen for a long time. After months apart, suddenly your heart feels known and loved. You are comfortable in one another's presence. You feel safe and valued. Can you feel this?

Thank you for taking the time to connect to the feelings of Psalm 133. At the heart of this Psalm is belonging. It is a song of praise to our God who saves us into family by grace, and who shows us in love that we belong to one another and to God. In this place of belonging, there is unity and connection. The natural outflow of this sense of belonging and unity and connection is praise and worship to the Lord our God. When we sing praises to God, we give God glory and we participate in an act that draws us closer to God and to each other.

Many modern studies have shown that singing has cognitive and emotional benefits. Singing has been shown to help us regulate our emotions. So... singing together can be seen as “group co-regulation.” As we sing and worship together, we are helping one another to release our anxieties and worries as we come into this space and find our center and place of belonging in this sacred community. When we sing as a gathered body of Christ, we are participating in an act that builds our sense of safety and belonging with one another. As we enter into this time exploring the unity of praise today, let us pray...

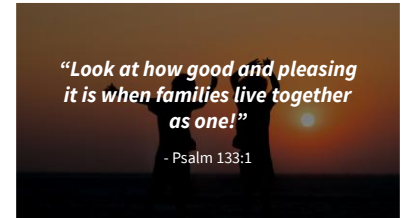
God of generosity and miracles, we come to you, humbly begging for even the crumbs that fall from the table of your Word. Bless us so that we may hear what you are saying to us, and so that we humbly and gladly receive your grace, so that we may bear it to others, for the sake of the healing of the world, in the name of Christ. And now, O God, I ask that you would bless the words of my mouth and that the meditation of all of our hearts would be pleasing in your sight. You are our rock and our redeemer, our Christ and our king. Amen.

Have you ever taken a walk on a really foggy day or on a day when the humidity is extremely high? As you walk, you can feel a fine coating of moisture beginning to cover your body. It is as if water had been poured down upon you. The writer of Psalm 133 would argue that in these cases, you have been blessed by the waters of heaven. With this idea and image of being covered in the waters of heaven, hear again verse 2: *“It is like expensive oil poured over the head, running down onto the beard.”* This is the blessing of God – the outpouring that cannot be contained, the blessing that flows down over you and around you. And when we are closely connected to God and to one another, it is the blessing that flows through you, out into the world and into the lives of those that you interact with. This is the blessing from heaven.

*“It is like expensive oil
poured over the head,
running down onto the beard.”*

- Psalm 133:2

This blessing from heaven happens and occurs most often when we are in community. That is what the psalmist is getting at in verse 1. Here he or she writes, *“Look at how good and pleasing it is when families live together as one!”* There is so much in this one verse. The psalmist invites us to see what community is like when lived as God intends it to be lived. The word that the psalmist uses that we translate “good” is the same Hebrew word used in Genesis 1, when God looked at all of creation and declared that it was good. There is more than circumstance or even intentionality in the psalmist’s choice of this word. This unity, this living and being together as one – that has been God’s intent for this world since before the beginning of time.



In the scriptures, the word “pleasing” or “pleasant” is often used in tandem with good. As in, all that is good is pleasing to God. The Hebrew word used by the psalmist can also be translated as lovely, attractive, friendly, and joyous. Read with this understanding, there is exuberance in this verse. What is good and pleasing is both intended and beautiful, joyful and full of life. This is a depiction of the kingdom of God. It is a description of what our human relationships should look like when lived within the divine presence. These relationships are defined in terms of “family.” To be good and pleasing to God is to live into our call to journey together in faith as the family of God, to live in right relationships with one another, and to live as a sign of the kingdom of God present to the world.

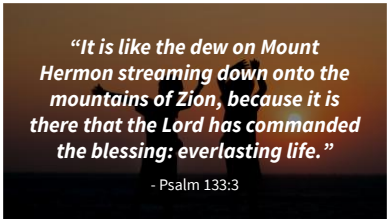
When we live this way, as God intends us to live, there is a mutuality, a connection, a love that has the power to draw others in. When love and grace and compassion and care and forgiveness are the signs of the community of faith, through our practices of hospitality and invitation and inclusion, others are attracted to the body of Christ.

Returning to verse 2, the psalmist is connecting the good and pleasing unity in the family of God to the anointing of Aaron, the high priest. This was first and foremost a priestly anointing. Within the Hebrew community, the priests served as the intermediaries between the people and God. The priests would bring the people's joys and concerns, prayers and heartaches to the very throne of God.

By comparing the anointing of Aaron to the unity found in the family of God, the psalmist is declaring that the family of God can also act as intermediaries. So this oil of blessing, this anointing from God, it is not a blessing just for you and for me and for all who are a part of the family of God. No, this blessing that runs down and pours over the beard – it is an invitation for all people to enter into the presence of God. This blessing that runs down over the collar of the robe, it is a symbol of office, yes, but is also a reminder that God calls all of us to be in service to the world. So this unity is not good and pleasing for its own sake. It is good and pleasing to the world, for all of humanity.

In Jewish culture, even into the New Testament, the anointing with oil was a symbol of welcome and inclusion and belonging. Whenever one received a guest into their home, it was customary to anoint the head with oil, to wash the hands and feet, and to greet them with a kiss. In the story of the woman who anoints Jesus' feet with her tears, Jesus had been offended because his host refused to welcome him with these traditions. At the end of Luke 7, while dining at a Pharisee's house, a woman known as a "*sinner*" came and wet Jesus' feet with her tears, drying them with her hair. She kissed his feet and then poured perfumed oil on them. These were all signs of welcome and inclusion and belonging. In this story, as in Psalm 133, we see what it looks like to offer radical and extravagant hospitality, to extend a welcome and inclusion that goes above and beyond. In doing so, we are acting in ways that make everyone feel welcome in the family of God.

The idea of going above and beyond is also found in verse 3 of our Psalm. Here we read this about the generous and abundant blessings of God: *“It is like the dew on Mount Hermon streaming down onto the mountains of Zion, because it is there that the Lord has commanded the blessing: everlasting life.”* Here the psalmist writes of the dew that refreshes the earth. It flows from Mount Hermon to Zion – that is quite the flow. Mount Hermon sits to the north, just over one hundred miles away from Jerusalem. Practically, it would be almost impossible for the dew to be so abundant that it could flow over a hundred miles. But what if the author is not writing of actual dew or even of anointing oil, but of the unity possible within the family of God?



“It is like the dew on Mount Hermon streaming down onto the mountains of Zion, because it is there that the Lord has commanded the blessing: everlasting life.”

- Psalm 133:3

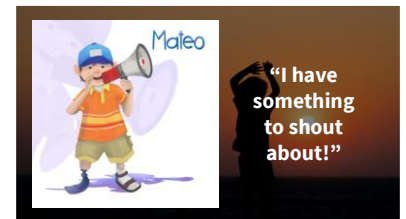
What if this image is a picture of the family of God, living together in unity? What if the psalmist is speaking of an all-inclusive family of God, one that includes the nations and peoples that presently live north of Israel? What if Psalm 133 is painting a picture of all of creation being gathered up into the family of God, where all of creation and all of humanity find welcome, inclusion, and belonging?

In the literal sense, in the area between Mount Hermon and Zion, there was little rainfall. The dew that came each morning was therefore life-giving in a very real sense. It was a blessing and a necessity for life to flourish in this region. Last week we were called to sing praises. You were challenged to sing a song of praise to yourself if you were in need of a reminder of God’s love and care for you. If you were not in need of such a reminder, you were challenged to share a song of praise with someone who needed to hear of and maybe experience God’s power and presence in their lives. In these ways, our songs of praise were like the dew, like the anointing oil: a small but necessary blessing that brings life.

The Psalm invites us to imagine a unity without borders, without conditions, without admission criteria or prices. The Psalm invites us to understand our faith community as a place of welcome, inclusion, and belonging – for all people and for all of creation. The author invites us to see praise as a unifying force, as something that brings us together. This past week at VBS, our daily characters and our songs of praise taught us how to practice welcome and inclusion and belonging.

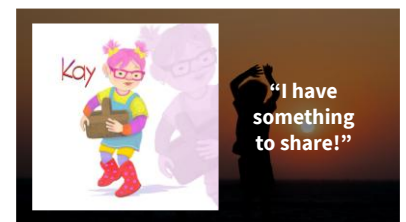
On Sunday evening, our character was named Mateo. Mateo is thoughtful and kind. He uses his voice to ask for what he and others need. At times, when necessary, he shouts. Our Bible story

was the story of blind Bartimaeus. You might recall that he shouted and shouted for Jesus, even though those around him tried to quiet him. Jesus heard him, called him, and gave him his sight. Who do you need to hear, to call, to bring healing and wholeness to their life, restoring them to community and belonging, giving them worth and purpose?



On Monday evening, our character was named Kay. Kay is optimistic and generous. She likes to share what she has, often through volunteering in her community. Our Bible story was the

feeding of the 5,000. In John's gospel, we remember that Jesus had compassion on the crowd, first healing their diseases. He then met their food insecurity, feeding 5,000 men plus women and children from two fish and five loaves. It did not seem possible, but through God's blessing, a community was fed. Who do you know that has a need – maybe food, maybe something else material, maybe something relational, like time and presence? How can you give what you have been blessed with, sharing with others, meeting a need, so that they too can find welcome, inclusion, and belonging?



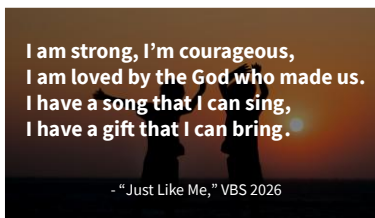
Lastly, on Tuesday night we met Maya. Maya is passionate and confident. When she hears about a difficult or hard situation, Maya comes up with creative ways to help. Our Bible story came from 2nd Kings 5, where Naaman the Syria is healed of his skin disease.



An outsider came to find Elisha the prophet, seeking to be made whole. In the end, Naaman experienced God's healing power. Who might be searching for someone to be passionate about what keeps them from community and from belonging? Might you be who they are searching for? And, if so, how might the Holy Spirit lead and guide you in ways that fill you with a holy confidence, in ways that can restore someone to community and belonging?

All three evenings we sang songs that taught about and spoke about welcome, inclusion, and belonging. In just a little while, these songs will be the soundtrack for our time of anointing with oil, bringing God's blessing to you and your life. While I hope that you listen to these words that teach about value and worth and welcome, inclusion, and belonging, I want to share the bridge to our theme song, "Just Like Me." Here are the first few words:

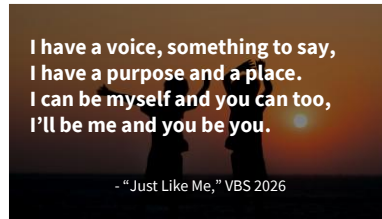
I am strong, I'm courageous,
I am loved by the God who made us.
I have a song that I can sing,
I have a gift that I can bring.



Because God loves us, we can all be strong and courageous. Like Mateo and like Jesus with blind Bartimaeus, we can stand and speak and maybe even shout for those who need our help. This can be the song that we sing, the gift of voice and power and presence that can draw others into community, into a place where they are loved and valued and worthy.

The bridge continues with these words:

I have a voice, something to say,
 I have a purpose and a place.
 I can be myself and you can too,
 I'll be me and you be you.



Each of us have a voice – given and gifted by God for God’s purposes in our world. Maybe your voice is thoughtful and kind. Maybe it is optimistic and generous. Maybe it is passionate and confident. Whatever your voice, there is a place in this world that needs your voice. May we all use our voice this week, building the kingdom of God in our time and place, drawing others into community through our songs of welcome, inclusion, and belonging. May it be so for you and for me this week. Alleluia and amen.

GPS – Grow, Pray, Study

- 1) *Grow*. How can you put your voice to work this week, using the gifts and talents that God has given you, drawing others into the family of God?
- 2) *Pray*. Do some digging in and growing deep this week – our VBS goals. Spend some time in prayer this week, seeking to discern where and how God might use you to help build the kingdom of God in this time and place.
- 3) *Study*. Read our VBS stories from this week: Mark 10:46-52, John 6:1-15, and 2nd Kings 5:1-14. What do these stories teach you about welcome, inclusion, and belonging?