

Kindred, Together

A Reflection for Pilgrim Congregational Church, UCC, Lexington

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September 12, 2021

Psalm 133

One: How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!

All: It is like precious oil on the head...

One: It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion.

All: where the Lord has promised to bless the people with life forevermore.

Psalm 130, adapted from the Inclusive Bible

1 Out of the depths I cry to you.

2 God, hear my voice! Let your ears be attentive to my voice, my cries for mercy!

3 If you kept track of our sins, God, who could stand before you?

4 But with you is forgiveness, and for this we revere you.

5 So I wait for you, God — my soul waits, and in your word I place my trust.

6 My soul longs for you, God, more than sentinels long for the dawn, more than sentinels long for the dawn.

7 Israel, put your hope in God, for with God is abundant love and the fullness of deliverance;

8 God will deliver Israel from all its failings.

Prayer

Reflection

I have the Psalms on my mind, and these two in particular because they are Pilgrimage psalms and we are Pilgrims who are journeying together. In the ancient context, these Psalms were for the people's journey, three times a year to Jerusalem, to a mountain in Jerusalem called Zion, to a place of peace and refuge. In Psalm 133, that dew making it from Hermon to Zion traveled a hundred miles so it probably meant: how good it is to be reunited with one another and brought home.

I want to just reflect on two things from these Psalms today.

First: How good and pleasant it is when kindred dwell together in unity.

We are not alone. We are part of a loving community, and we are connected in faith beyond just this congregation. It is precious like dew from Hermon falling upon Zion; it is a blessing to be together as kindred; it is wonderful to be part of a community where everyone is welcome. One of our hymnwriters says, Ours is the church where everybody's welcome - we are a dazzling bouquet of every kind of flower. Jump in the vase, we've got space for more. (Bret Hesla, "Dazzling Bouquet")

My second point: Out of the depths we cry out to God.

A colleague of mine, a year ago now, said CoVid means a species-wide trauma for humanity. Does that ring true? Does that still ring true, eighteen months in?

Some of us also recall the deep trauma of 9/11, which we're remembering this weekend.

Whenever we experience trauma there are things we need to heal, and one of them is community.

In this collective trauma, it's even more important to have a community, a group of people you have claimed, and who have claimed you, a group where we have been welcomed in our full selves, and where we can be honest. We can let it all out. Shout with joy when we are joyful, grab the

kleenex when we grieve and are sad - when you are in community, both ways of being are part of our common life.

S. Kelley Harrell says, "We don't heal in isolation, but in community."

That was true all the way back when the Psalms were written.

Even when a Psalm was in first person singular, it was still meant to be sung in community. This is our story, this is our song. And the Psalmists are our models for saying whatever we need to to God, in faith, and in community. When we cry out from the depths to God it's not a sign of lack of faith - it's a holy way of praying. The Psalmists also model trust in God's compassion. We learn from the Psalms to wait for God, which is the same word in Hebrew for hope in God - so sometimes, if we're not feeling it, not experiencing God's love, it's okay to say that we long for it, we wait for it. The Psalmist says hold on - and we hold on. We sit together. We join with people from thousands of years ago who cried out from the depths and we sit together *now*, praying together, knowing that our prayers both connect us to our Creator, and to one another.

We're going to be doing this in more than words this fall - we're going to create an art project over the next few weeks, about how we are living through CoVid 19 as a community. Symbols of joy, heartache, blessing, sadness, all the things we bear with one another. So I am asking all of you to contribute something in the next two weeks. You can email me a picture, you can drop something off in the box near the door, you can bring something in person. And I thought I'd show you a few of the things I brought, as a way into our prayer time.

(A mask angel - in thanksgiving for science, for masks and vaccines and things that are helping; a face shield - in lament for all the time we could not be with one another; a paint brush - in wonder over new things learned; a peace rock - in thanksgiving for the care our congregation offered to its elders, teachers, and college students, a butterfly page - in thanksgiving for

letters and phone calls and care packages and signs of hope; a USB mic - in thanksgiving for technology which is still helping us be a community.)

What these things have in common - in addition to CoVid 19 - is that they symbolize community and resilience and care. And so we are back to the first idea: How good it is when kindred live together in unity....somewhere in there is the building up of God's kin-dom.

Amen.

And now, let's lift up all our prayers - joys and concerns, from zoom and in the sanctuary.