

The Church: God Made It & Let's Us Live In It

Psalm 133

How good and pleasant it is when brothers 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 upon the collar of his robes.

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

Community is the result of living together not from being in the same geographical location.

Judi and I have had the good fortune to live in many places. Well, it looks like a blessing on this end of it anyway. We have lived in places where everyone waved at you when you drove by or walked on the street. We thought those were the friendly places until we went to sit with them in the café or talk with them at the park. They knew who we were and they treated us like the strangers that we were.

For most, the word "community" immediately brings to mind images of friendliness and intimacy. The same can often be true in the church. Pastors speak of community as if it were the "Holy Grail" of church life. What that looks like in the company of the believers is portrayed in rose tinted hues with the sound of violins swelling in the background. But often our experience in the church reflects a different reality.

What is true community? And how do we achieve it? We get an idea from the Psalmist's description of his experience in [Psalm 133](#).

Community is what you get when you are focusing on something else.

“How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!” Psalm 133:1

The Psalmist begins in [verse 1](#) with a statement that seems too obvious to mention: "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!" This is a statement of affirmation not information. Community exists where people live together in unity.

Community is a byproduct of life together, not an end in itself. Maybe that's why our efforts to create community so often fail. We focus on community instead of on life.

When a man, woman and their children share the same building there is little unity and therefore no community. When they share life they become a family. Family, community, comes out of the difficult task of living together.

Christian Community is not some ideal, but the experience of sharing our life's pilgrimage. David was the last person you would want to take "community in family" lessons from. His brothers showed real disdain for him when he showed up to see what was happening with Goliath. He destroyed trust with his family in his affair and plotted against his son for the throne. On the other hand, who better to tell us what it takes to be in real community with the people we so often do not like.

You may remember what Johnny Carson said referring to "Thanksgiving is an emotional holiday. People travel thousands of miles to be with people they only see once a year.

And then discover once a year is way too often."

An elderly man in Phoenix calls his son in New York and says, "I hate to ruin your day, but I have to tell you that your mother and I are divorcing—45 years of misery is enough."

"Pop, what are you talking about?" the son asks.

"We can't stand the sight of each other any longer," the old man says. "We're sick of each other, and I'm sick of talking about this, so you call your sister in Chicago and tell her." Frantic, the son calls his sister, who explodes on the phone. "Like heck they're getting divorced," she shouts. "I'll take care of this."

She calls Phoenix immediately and screams at her father, "You are NOT getting divorced. Don't do a single thing till I get there. I'm calling my brother back, and we'll both be there tomorrow. Until then, don't do a thing."

The old man hangs up the phone and turns to his wife. "Okay," he says, "They're coming for Thanksgiving and paying their own fares. Now what do we do for Christmas?"

Taken from the Internet; submitted by Van Morris, Mount Washington, Kentucky
Even though there are few Hallmark Families God put us in families to learn about community so we could live in His family the community of the church. Robert Frost observed that, "Home is the place where, when you have to go there, they have to take you in." A family is those people from whom you can never really disassociate yourself. A family is the place where you belong and the people who, like it or not, belong to you. For many of us, this probably comes as something of a disappointment, because frankly, we were hoping for something better. That's why it's important to notice the second assertion David makes about community.

Community is a sacred experience.

"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 133:2

Oil was especially important in religious life, where the practice of anointing priests and kings signified consecration to God and to special service. But the oil David speaks of in this verse was especially sacred, because it was used to anoint the High Priest—Aaron. This oil was not to be used for ordinary purposes, nor was it to be duplicated. In fact, it was so sacred that anyone who copied it or used it for common purposes was to be put to death. While the elements used to make this sacred anointing oil were common elements—they might be used everyday for other purposes—when put together this way, they took on a sacred character.

There are three elements to any community.

1. The fundamental nature of the communal experience. Sacred

The community of sports fans hold it as a truism that their team is the most important to them, whether it is the best in the league or not. The community of teachers hold that their profession is the most important to the common good – if you are a part of this community and do not hold this as a truism then you may teach but you are not a teacher. The community of family holds that the family is made up of people connected by blood and marriage – no other connection is valid for this community. We may eat out with friends but we have holiday meals with family.

The community of the church also has a fundamental nature. It is not love – though that is the action that is meant to show the world whose we are and every time we put other Christians down we are disclaiming the church as our community. It is not attendance – though being absent is not going to bring us into community. The fundamental nature of the church is Jesus. When church attenders put anything in front of Jesus mission and purpose they choose to not be a part of the church community.

If the church does not feel like a community to you it could be because you do not hold the fundamental nature of the church to be part of your fundamental nature.

2. The normal of the communal experience. Secular

The experience of Christian community is much like the kind of community we experience in other settings—on the job, at the gym, sharing a meal at a restaurant, talking over the fence in your backyard. The kind of people we meet with and the conversations we have are not all that different from those we have in church. They sound the same and often feel the same.

The problem comes when the community of the church becomes too common. There ought to be something besides yesterday's game or last week's stock market numbers that focuses our attention when we think of being God's people.

Jesus becomes our guide on this issue for he was the union of the human and the divine. The divine did not make the human less human, and the human did not detract from the divine. Jesus Christ is fully God; he is also fully human.

In the same way, there is a union between the sacred and the ordinary in our experience of Christian community. Christian community is "sacred" not because we adopt a different persona when we walk through the church doors. Christian community isn't sacred because we leave our secular experiences and everyday interests behind us when we come into the sanctuary. The thing that makes Christian community sacred is not even the fact that we all like each other, or because we always treat one another the way Christians ought to treat each other. The secret to real Christian community is our commitment to make the ordinary profitable for the sacred. When the secular/ordinary and the sacred are separated we suffer from a multiple personality disorder. When Christians are asked to comment on the social condition of the world we pause – because we see the self destructive nature of our friends and neighbors but fear commenting on it because we see the same self destruction in ourselves. What makes us different?

It is our fundamental nature that makes us different.

3. The abnormal of the communal experience. Profane

There are in all communities a people who claim the community but are not willing to live by the fundamental nature of the community. Family members who want to be in the family but do not want to live according to the nature of the family. For the most part they are treated as interested outsiders – they are invited to the big events but not the casual events. The real problem comes when they become toxic to the community. They demand admittance without being willing to submit to the rules. When the family admits them without restriction they change the fundamental nature of the community and usually not for the good.

In America today we have people who want to change the fundamental nature of the church by requiring followers of Jesus to adopt the fundamental nature of people who do not follow Jesus. Their stick is the phrase, “you aren’t very Christian are you.” This only becomes profane to the church when the members of this community accept that lie as truth. We are a special blend of life’s truths put together by God for the purpose of introducing Him to the world.

If we allow others to mix our “oil” we will not be a community of believers but a community of interested persons. Believing Jesus is God but acting as if God does not have a fundamental nature. At the end of the day a community of followers of Jesus are not put together by a certain methodology but by God.

The Secret To Real Community Is Not A Matter Of Methodology; It's A Matter Of God

“It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.”

Psalm 133:3

David is clear that God is the only one who can enable us to "dwell together in peace." This Psalm is a "Psalm of ascent." It was one of the pilgrim Psalms, sung by worshipers as they made the ascent to Jerusalem. Notice that the dew of Mount Hermon did not usually fall on Mount Zion. The same is true of our spiritual journey. We do not always skip along the pilgrim path. Sometimes we "toil along the winding way, with painful steps and slow."

Community is not a consequence of random factors beyond our control with one group clicking and another not. Christian community does not rely on the mix of people who happens to show up or even of leadership or group process.

But the Psalmist offers a theological explanation in verse 3: "It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore." Literally, the text says the Lord "*commands* the blessing."

The blessing of staying in community with God and His people is life ever more.

Since Christ has come, of course, things have changed. We no longer look to Jerusalem. Community is the byproduct.

Unfortunately we have reversed the order. We thought the problem was that we didn't know how to get along. We thought the secret to finding community was to just treat everybody with care and not hurt anyone's feelings. We thought if we disturbed community with rules or requirements that we would destroy the fundamental nature of who God has called us to be. Our mistake has been to set community as the primary focus, rather than the Lord himself. Christ is the key to community. The thing that makes a group of Christians a community is the mutual bond we share in Jesus Christ, and Jesus reminds us that if we say we believe in Him then we will do the will of God. We become a vibrant and welcoming and compassionate community when we reject all standards but God.

Love Is Not The Only Apologetic Argument For The Truth Of The Gospel, But It Is The Most Compelling.

John 13:34-35

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

But get this straight – don't not let this one vital factor slip past you – it is love for the church. The other people in this world who are followers of Jesus. No matter how recalcitrant they may appear to be to you, they are not as far removed from you as those who have refused to accept Jesus as Lord and been willing to come under His moral law. In 1997, the Washington Capitals were one of the hottest hockey teams on ice, skating their way into the Stanley Cup finals. By the fall of 1999, they had slipped to the brink of disaster with one of the worst records in the NHL.

Coach Ron Wilson decided drastic measures were necessary and quickly changed their strategy. Yet injuries abounded, and the losses mounted. The team was skating on thin ice and couldn't figure out what was wrong.

Just before Christmas, the team embarked on a late-night, seven-hour flight from Vancouver and did what they typically do on a flight of that duration: they popped in a video to pass the time. To unwind. To lick their wounds. That's when the unexpected happened. The VCR froze.

As the plane winged its way through the evening sky, one by one the players broke the ice and started talking with each other. They talked strategy. Obstacles. Key plays. Out of necessity, they rediscovered the ancient art of conversation. By the time the plane touched down, the Capitals had picked apart their game and knew what needed to be done.

In the weeks that followed, they became virtually unstoppable, going on an 11-game winning streak. Team goaltender Olaf Kolzig reflected, "Maybe it was fate the VCR didn't work. It gave us a chance to just roam about the plane and talk with guys. It was a good way to clear the air." Indeed. They went 12-2-3 after the busted VCR incident. Bob De Moss, *Plugged In* (4-04-01), p. 9; submitted by Darin Reimer, Victoria, British Columbia