

Rappahannock Christian Church – 8/14/11

Dr. Kenneth Wilbur

Communion Meditation

When we come here to this moment that is the center of our worship each week, we don't just look at these Elements, we take them in our hand; we put them into our mouths. They are to be a physical reminder to us that they represent the body and blood of Christ. In this moment we remember that Jesus freely offered His body and blood to ransom us from sin.

There is a gulf between God and us. It is His sacrifice that wipes the gulf out. Instead of death, we receive His grace and love, His forgiveness and His life.

So then, are we to think to give nothing in return for such a great gift?

No!! This moment is also an opportunity! It is a moment where we can remember what God has done for us, and we can respond by giving fully of ourselves in our energy, our love and our service. Let me read the words of the Apostle Paul to you, as he wrote them to the Corinthians.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 – For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Like Oil On The Head

As happens so very often, the sermon today has already been preached in the prayer that one of our Elders -- in this case, Nancy Wyatt -- gave at the Communion Table. Our Scripture today is Psalm 133. It is just 3 verses long, and it is all about Christian communion and unity.

Psalm 133 – How good and pleasant it is
when brothers live together in unity!
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.
It is as if the dew of Hermon
were falling on Mount Zion.
For there the LORD bestows his blessing,
even life forevermore.

Well, fashions come and go, but I have to admit that I have never liked oily hair.

But, things were different in ancient times. They used oil in their hair for many reasons. For one, they lived in a very dry climate, and applying oil helped to condition the scalp. The oil was sometimes aromatic. I suppose it was something like deodorant or perfume. Oil was also used for medicinal purposes at times, though I don't think that is what is in view here in Psalm 133. The use of oil mentioned in this psalm was as part of a ritual. Pouring oil on the head set a person apart. It indicated that they had been chosen, consecrated, commissioned for a special office or purpose.

This psalm is only 3 verses long. In verse 1 the writer tells us plainly what his poem is about: "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!" He says it's just so nice, so good, so pleasant. It's like the anointing of Aaron. It's like the sweet oil running down from his head. It's like the dew that falls on Mt. Hermon (another kind of dome!) that keeps things alive in a desert land.

The psalm simply exclaims how clear and undisputed a blessing it is when people live in unity.

The only part of the psalm that isn't completely clear to me is what the psalmist means by "brothers." Is he speaking about biological siblings or spiritual brothers? It seems to me that it could be either. Maybe part of the artistry of the psalm is that it could mean both.

Let's assume, first, that it is unity within the context of a biological family that he has in mind. Is this unity so uncommon that it should engender wonder, thanks and praise?

Now, there surely are families that have conflict and strife. I know a man who recently told me that his brother had taken for himself all of his parents' inheritance. It was causing financial pain to the person I spoke to. But the hurt feelings that were so evident may have been causing even more pain! Brothers should love and care about one another. They should share. They were not good feelings this man was telling me about! Surely it is a huge blessing when one's biological family is living together in unity.

But I think it is also possible that the psalmist was talking about spiritual brethren, those who are connected by faith. These are people who worship and honor God. They try to serve God fully, and make their very lives an offering to God. Is unity so uncommon among spiritual brethren?!!!

We would like to think that unity within the household of faith is the common experience of us all. But look at the final prayer of Jesus, right before his arrest and execution (John 17). What did he pray for? He pleaded with the Father that His followers might experience unity! Why did Jesus feel that he needed to spend some of his last moments on earth talking with His Father about Christian community and love? Well, perhaps it is because in looking down the ages He could see that this would be a very real problem. The church, sadly, has *not* been united.

Likewise, it seems like every other page Paul is addressing this issue. "You are all one body," he says, "You know that the foot doesn't say to the hand, 'I don't need you,

neither does the hand exist without the eyes.’” But this factionalism is exactly what has happened all too often within the Church.

Those who founded our brotherhood, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), saw this disunity. They were shocked and appalled by it. They issued a plea for unity to the entire church.

Some of you may know that I hurt my shoulder a couple of weeks ago. I’ve been going for physical therapy on it. The other day my therapist was asking about what I do. I told her that I am a minister, and as so often happens, she said, “Disciples of Christ? I never heard of them. What do you-all believe?” So I told her. As I spoke to her about our belief in the fellowship and unity of all Christians, she nodded her head in total agreement.

Well, I can’t tell you how many times I’ve had that experience. Every time I talk with someone about what Disciples believe, they nod their head and say, "Yes! That is the way it should be!"

And so, I have to ask myself, where are all those people? Why aren't they here filling our pews?

Some, of course, are worshiping in other churches. They believe (perhaps rightly so) that differences among churches are ok, but agree with us that sometimes churches should cooperate in worship and mission. Many, however, are unchurched. I believe that this vision of unity is a great asset for us. We must get the word out! We must tell people that we are trying to live into, trying to manifest more fully, the unity that is a fundamental characteristic of Christ's body. We can invite them to be part of us, a community of believers that not only believes in unity, but also actively supports and promotes it amongst the brethren and in the world.

So now I’ve given you two ways we might apply this psalm.

I think you should consider what is happening within your biological family. Do you find plenty of love and trust there? You cannot control what others say, think and do. But you can make sure that, as far as YOU are concerned, you are going to make every effort to love and respect and support the members of your family. This is not always easy. It is sometimes very hard. Maybe you will have to be extra forgiving and extra kind. You may not see that your actions are having any effect. No matter! It is what you are called to do in Christ!

There’s also the love that we have for our spiritual brethren. It is so important to pray for the leaders of our church. We are considering how we can best reach out to others. Share your ideas and thoughts. Support each other. Affirm each other. Help the church to grow spiritually and numerically!

I pray that each of you will resolve today to be a catalyst for unity within the life of your biological families and within the Family of God.

Benediction

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. – 2 Corinthians 13:14