

Introduction: Happy New Year to you all!

My name is Roi Nu and I am a student Pastor here at West during the summer. I originally come from Myanmar. In my culture, when you meet with someone or a stranger or a friend, the first thing you need to do is to shake your hand with that person, and say ‘Kaja nga ai i?’ which means ‘How are you?’ Shaking one’s another hands is passing peace to another person or sharing blessings with one another. Today is a special day, a New Year’s Day, so now I would like to encourage you to turn around to the person next to you, shake their hand and say Happy New Year. Shall we do it now!

This morning our reading comes from the book of Psalms. It’s one of the shortest Psalms in the Bible, a song of ascents of David, Psalm 133 which is about “the Blessings of Living in Unity.” It’s a song sung by the pilgrims as they made their way to Jerusalem to celebrate their annual religious festivals such as: Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles. It’s a real celebration of family and community and oneness, where God pours out his abundant blessings to his people. Let’s hear the words of God from Psalm 133!

*¹ How good and pleasant it is
when God’s people 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 on the collar of his robe.*

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

Today in this New Year Day, we ‘West family’ and ‘St James family’ come and gather together in unity. We are united and worshipping God together here at West as a family. What does this Psalm 133 say to us today?

Firstly, what is the unity?

According to the Bible, Genesis 1:27 shows how God intentionally created human beings in his own image and He blessed them, and put them in the Garden of Eden to work in partnership with him and gave them authority to serve and take care of the rest of his creation (Gen. 2:15). It is very clear that the creation account shows all human beings and the rest of creation were meant to be united together in unity to fulfil God’s divine purposes.

So, unity is very important because unity is not just getting along with one another or unity is not just sitting and eating food together or unity is not just doing things together. But unity is the statement of being one, or unity is togetherness, or unity is united in oneness to fulfil God’s divine purposes.

In the beginning of Psalm 133, the Psalmist says: *¹ How good and pleasant it is
when God's people live together in unity!*

Here is saying that when God's people come together in unity, they are one, they are united and they are together. This means, all Christians (Baptist or Roman Catholic or Presbyterian or Methodist or Anglican etc.) are one to fulfil God's divine purposes. We are united and together, which is good and pleasant. It's a beautiful and incredible thing. Last week on a Christmas Day, many people came to Church and celebrated together the birth of Jesus. That was amazing. That's unity.

But unity is not just celebrating of good times or special occasions like Christmas or New Year and it's also coming together and being together even when life turns on the dark side or life falls apart. For example, many people from West know Cath Pool who died recently. Before she died, she was a part of West Baptist Church. Now she has left us, so the rest of the family and friends are very sad. On Friday, many friends and families came to the funeral service and were with this grieving family saying goodbye together to Cath. It's been incredible to see how the people of God has come together to surround this grieving family. That's unity, oneness and togetherness. It's wonderful to see everyone come together and be united. According to Psalm 133, when we 'Christians' come together in unity, we become one and united in all the circumstances of life.

Secondly, what will happen when we live together in unity?

As the Psalmist says: *¹ How good and pleasant it is
when God's people live together in unity!*

According to verse 1, when God's people live together in Unity it is good and pleasant. Good is one of the best words in the entire Bible. I hope you all know this. The word 'good', here, is the same word use in Genesis 1 to describe God's assessment of creation. When God created everything "*He saw that it was good.*" God uses the word 'good' 5 times in Genesis 1 to describe things that He has made. It's the way that God has created everything and He wanted it to be. No other way can we truly live or exist. There's nothing better than that we live together in unity.

But our coming together in unity is not only "good", it is also, according to our Psalm, something that is pleasant. *How good and pleasant it is.* The word 'pleasant' is often used in parallel with 'good.' It means 'lovely, attractive, friendly and joyous.' The result of living together in unity can be seen two sacred blessings in verses 2 and 3.

The first blessing of living in unity is that it is like a precious oil.

As verse 2 says: *It is like precious oil poured on the head,
running down on the beard,
running down on Aaron's beard,
down on the collar of his robe.*

As the Psalmist says here, this is not ordinary oil, it is '*a precious oil.*' In the Old Testament, God used Moses set his brother Aaron apart as a holy priest by anointing him with oil (Leviticus 8:13). According to verse 2, *unity is like that anointing oil.* Brothers and sisters,

can you imagine anointing someone and the oil running down all over the body. The Psalmist says our unity is like that. When God's people live together in unity that sets us apart from the world. If you wonder why the Christian churches are different, it's because our unity makes us holy and sets us apart from the world.

The second blessing of living in unity is the living life which is like the water of Mt Hermon Falling on Mt Zion. Let's look at verse 3, as the Psalmist says:

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

If we want to understand this verse deeply, we need to know a little bit of geography. Mt Hermon is in the north-east of Palestine and Lebanon. It's about 10 thousand feet height and has snow on it for most of the year. It's the tallest mountain in the region and it's surrounded by many dry lands. In the middle of these dry lands, Mt Hermon is constantly covered with snow that melts and becomes the water of the Jordan river and other rivers. The Jordan river runs from Mt Hermon all the way down to Jerusalem and Mt Zion.

Mt Zion, however, is not a big mountain and the name of Zion means a hard place or sunny mountain. Zion is a kind of barren hill, a dry and hard area.

So Mt Hermon is very important because it provides water to the entire region. This is where life comes from. The dew of Hermon is life for the whole land. Without water there is no life. And without spiritual water there is no spiritual life. That is why *Jesus proclaims himself as the living water* (John 7:37). He is the water that can refresh and give life to the soul.

Thirdly, how do we find unity? How do we create this unity?

Verses 2 and 3 show us two sacred blessings of living in unity: It's holy and it gives us life. The Psalmist understands this, so he proclaims:

¹ How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!

Unity is a sacred gift from God. It's a given and in some ways it does not depend upon us. For example, in 2014, I went back to my country of 'Myanmar.' I visited the Orphan House where I grew up and I saw a lot of children who did not have shoes, who did not have enough clothes to cover their whole body but they were the happiest children I have ever seen. They lived together and they shared what they had. So this told me you can't buy happiness -those with so little seem to be the happiest of all. So our happiness doesn't depend on what we have or where we are. Those orphan children lived together in unity, even though they had nothing. They simply received the blessings of joyous life lived together in unity.

On the other hand, there are things we need to do together for unity. What these you ask? The Lord Jesus has already shown us the way. He said love one another as I have loved you. Forgive each other. Turn the other cheek; carry the burden for an extra mile and do for others what you would want them to do for you. He has shown us what true love is by laying down His life for His brothers and sisters.

Today, we live in a world that is broken and fragmented in all kinds of ways. There are rich and poor. In our New Zealand society, the richer people are getting richer and the poor people stay poor. As a result the latest statistics tell us that 1/3 of New Zealand children grow up in relative poverty. Again in the church, some people do not talk with one another. They gossip about one another, and they will not forgive each other. Even in some families, parents do not understand who their children are because they do not sit and talk together with their children. Children are also the same. They do not listen to what the parents say and they just do what they want. There are signs of disunity in many families, in the church and in the society, but today we are called to something better!

Brothers and sisters, today is first day of the New Year of 2017 -so let's love each another as Jesus has loved us, forgive each other as Jesus has forgiven us and be united in the name of Jesus. For as the Psalmist says at the end of verse 3:

“For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.”

Conclusion

Brothers and sisters, we now understand what unity is, what happens when we live together in unity and how we can find unity through Psalm 133. Living in unity as the followers of Jesus is good and pleasant, where God pours out his abundant blessings upon his people. These blessings are *like precious oil* and *the dew of Hermon*.

Today we meet together in fellowship which is part of this unity. We the ‘West’ family and St James family’ come together and worship God together here at the same time and in the same place. This fellowship is a sacred gift and trust we enjoy from God.

Some people say we don't need unity and we can just do everything on our own.... But God's blessing flows from unity together, so let's work together to please God and to see the blessings He wants to bring into our lives. Amen.