

In 1994, Raisin Bran released a commercial with this slogan: "Good, and Good For You." That's a bold claim. Especially because it's not really that true. It's an okay cereal, until you try Lucky Charms and realize that there is way better cereal out there. Also, it's not really that good for you either- one cup of Raisin Bran has more than half of your daily recommended amount of sugar- sorry to burst your bubble, Raisin Bran fans. This is a rule of life. Typically, things that taste good and are pleasant and enjoyable, pizza, sleeping until noon, Netflix, typically aren't that good for you, and the things that are good for you- , exercise, broccoli, reading books, often aren't particularly pleasant or delightful.

But in this Psalm, David puts two words together, a combination that is incredibly rare not only in Scripture, but in life in general: Good, "tov," in Hebrew- doesn't just mean good. It describes how things are supposed to be. Morally good. Functionally perfect. It's that word God used when he created the world. "Good" in David's mind means "The best; holistically healthy, morally right, and the way God wants it to be." "Pleasant," however, is used to describe something delicious or delightful. It's actually related to the word for "sweet." David knew how big of a deal it would be if something could be both sweet, pleasant, beautiful, and morally right, healthy, and good. That's why he starts this Psalm with "Behold!" He's saying, "Look, everyone! I found it. I found that one thing that's truly good, and good for you." What is that one thing? *Unity*.

David uses two rare, striking pictures to describe for us what Christian Unity is like. The first one is this: *Unity is like the precious oil that is poured over Aaron and runs down his head through his beard and onto his clothes.* When Aaron, Moses' brother was anointed in Leviticus 3, set apart by God and appointed to be the High Priest of Israel, he was drenched in oil. Now, the oil that was used wasn't just regular olive oil. It was oil mixed with cinnamon, myrrh, calamus, and cassia, several different shockingly expensive and rare ingredients that you could only get in the furthest corners of the world- it's actually a bit shocking that they would have had these things- they were found in places like India, and even China. This oil was probably one of the most expensive, precious, rare things Israel had in its possession, and it was used by God to set apart the one who would be in charge of all the sacrifices made in Israel. That oil that ran down Aaron's head onto his clothes, that set him apart from every other person, that's what unity is like.

David is saying that the unity of the Church is the precious, sacred gift from God that sets the Church apart from everyone else on Earth. David is saying that unity is God's blessing that comes down and drenches us, invigorates us, it's God pouring his blessing all over us and overwhelming us with something so good, so healing, and so refreshing, so valuable. What exactly is it? Christian unity is when we join our hearts in worship and sing our hymns not only to God, but to each other, and sharpen each other's minds during bible study. Unity is when we come to the Lord's table together with different backgrounds, different political opinions, different jobs, different cultures, and expressing that we are united by the grace that God has shown us, and realizing that we could travel across the world and enjoy that communion with people we've never even met because we are united by something deeper than ethnicity or nationality. Unity is when we go to each other's houses and watch football or celebrate holidays or just hang out because we actually enjoy each other's company. Christian unity is when instead of gossiping

about someone who offended you, you go to that person and forgive them because Christ forgave you for much worse. That unity is one of the most precious things we have on this Earth.

So, what might keep you from enjoying that unity? What might keep you from growing in faith with your brothers and sisters by worshiping and studying with them? What might prevent you from deepening your relationships with your brothers and sisters in Christ? What's stopping you from exhibiting Christ's love to your church family? It might be your opinions of the President, or social issues and you simply can't be around people who have different opinions? It might be your busyness and all the errands you have to run, or sports, or vacations that are holding you back from growing in the Word with your brothers and sisters and worshiping your Lord on an at least somewhat regular basis. Is it your pride, your sense of self importance, your bitterness, your cliquiness, your pettiness, that are holding you back from treating all of your brothers and sisters with the same respect, dignity, and love that Jesus gives to you and forgiving them the way Jesus forgives you? It could be your preferences, you like this kind of music, or this kind of worship, and since you don't get your way you stay away. If that's the case, something is wrong. Your priorities are off, and you have forgotten to prioritize what God wants you to prioritize.

Why is it so precious? Because you can't find this anywhere else. No other club or group exists where I can say, we may disagree about who should be president, how to raise kids, we don't come from the same place or culture, we may have little in common, but you're my brother. You're my sister. Because we were both sinners, and Christ willingly was crushed so we could be his people. Therefore, I'll respect you, cherish you, love you, and be there for you. And people need that. Before we get to the next verse, here's something to think about. What is our congregation's most valuable asset? What do you have that makes people come to St. John's? Yes, the Gospel. But consider this. Our music is great, but I can find better Christian music in about 5 seconds on YouTube from my couch. Your preaching is fine, but I can find better on the internet. Unity. Fellowship. The friendship among Christians. In an increasingly polarized, individualized world, people are looking for friends. A support system. I would argue that our unity and fellowship with each other may be our most attractive asset to the world. It's worth investing in.

We continue with verse 3.

Again- Context. Mt. Hermon is the tallest mountain in Israel, more than a hundred miles north of Mt. Zion- where Jerusalem is- specifically, where the temple is. Mt. Hermon is known for being extremely lush and green because it gets a ton of rain and snow. Mt. Zion, on the other hand, is about a quarter the height of Mt. Hermon, and is extremely arid and dry and dusty. In reality, Hermon is strikingly beautiful, while the area surrounding Jerusalem and Mt. Zion is, according to some, is not. Unity is like that precious, life-giving, life-sustaining dew from Hermon, refreshing the parched mouths in the desert. Imagine the picture- God's people coming together to celebrate the passover, finally seeing each other after such a long time, celebrating each other and coming together at the temple- David sees this and says, "wow, we might be in the desert, but there is no place as beautiful, as joyous, as filled with life, as this place right here."

But, notice what David says. This unity must be found at Zion, in the temple, founded upon sacrifice. No sacrifice, no unity. It must be found at Zion because that's where THE sacrifice happened and forged the most important unity, where God made eternal life, unity with him forever possible for us. When Jesus was murdered on the Cross, he made unity possible between us and God by paying for the sin that separated him from Adam, Eve, and all their descendents, he tore down the wall of sin that separated us and God- literally, the curtain in the temple was torn in two! The foundation of our unity with each other is the unity we have with God, bought with Jesus' blood. Because *that* barrier has been broken, the barriers that would normally separate us no longer do either. This is why christian unity is radically inclusive. Christians say, you're a sinner? So I am I. That's all that matters. Let's go to the cross. The Church, from the beginning, has been multi-cultural, multi-lingual, multi-political, multi-national, inviting rich and poor, man and woman, slave and free, to find their hope, joy, and comfort at the Cross.

It's been about a month and a half since any of you have looked at our even thought about a nativity scene. Yet, the Bible never says there were three wise men and they probably weren't there when Jesus was born anyway." It's funny because the artists in Medieval Europe that first painted these Wise Men weren't asserting that there were three magi and that they were somehow all there exactly when Jesus was born. The story behind why they started painting the nativity this way, though, is pretty fascinating. Usually, there are three wise men: a European-looking one with pale skin, one that looks Middle-Eastern or sometimes Asian, and one that looks African. This is because medieval Europeans saw the world as divided into three parts- Europe, the Orient (The Middle-East and anything east of that), and Africa. To them, that represented the whole world. The three wise men represent people of different cultures, nationalities, and ethnicities, who would normally be fighting wars with each other, enslaving each other, invading each other, hating each other, and shows that because of what Jesus did on the cross, it is not only possible, but inevitable, for all of them to come together, to be friends, to be family, to be united. And what is it that unites them? One king, which all of them worship by giving different gifts to honor Jesus in their own way. That's Psalm 133 unity, a foretaste of the unity of people of every nation, tribe, and tongue, united by one king.

Let's apply that. How do we participate in the worldwide unity of God's family? Prioritize your unity with your brothers and sisters. Don't rebuild barriers that Jesus has destroyed. And most importantly, find your greatest joy in the unity with the Holy Trinity that Jesus won for you, and express that unity in the way that you forgive, tolerate, listen to, and appreciate every different brother and sister that God has blessed you with. That means sacrifice. That means saying no to your preferences and choosing to serve others for their benefit, not yours. But if God's telling the truth, that means that in doing that you will find something that isn't just morally good, or healthy. You will find something beautiful and delightful. Something sweet. Precious, invaluable oil that drenches you. Quenching dew that relieves your thirst. Something good, and good for you. Amen.