

“Resurrection Community”
Sermon by Lisa Crismore
April 11, 2021 – John Knox Presbyterian Church

Psalm 133

How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity! It is like the precious oil on the head, running down upon the beard of Aaron, running down over the collar of his robes. It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion. For there the Lord ordained his blessing, life forevermore.

Last Sunday was Easter Sunday. We had a record number attending worship for Covid, which is usually what happens on a special holiday. However, because of the pandemic, it was unusual as some were worshiping online and some were in person. The biggest thing I noticed was the joy people had in being together! There was a buzz out in the hall after worship as people wanted to socialize. Yes, many did not observe the social distancing rules of hugging each other. I have to admit to being guilty to this. I even saw on Facebook where many people remarked that they were overjoyed to be with family and friends for Easter, remembering last year when we all stayed home to keep everyone safe. Now more than ever, we know the precious gift of coming together when so much of our society has been in isolation. Even though the people, who have joined us online are not with us in person, they are with us in spirit as they have joined us so that we can worship together. I have heard numerous times that people are so thankful to have the technology throughout this past year, which has kept us united.

It is no doubt then that we can echo the Psalmist words today, “How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!” If we could sing, we could join the Israelites as they sung in unity as they ascended the elevated land, which would take them to the temple in Jerusalem. We hear kindred, which many would think of kin or family but this was the church family coming together in harmony.

This choir of people sings of the blessing of unity with wonderful imagery as they enter the sanctuary. We hear that coming together in unity is like oil. Oil pressed from the nearby olive trees and used to anoint the people. This rich liquid is given with abundance as it runs down the face and onto the collar of those receiving this blessing. There was an extravagance with the way the oil was placed on the foreheads of the receiver. One might say it was an honor to receive but also a little messy!

We also hear that coming together in unity is like dew. Dew is the moisture in the morning or evening that is needed for rebirth in the hot dry desert of Jerusalem. It is like a cool glass of water, which parches your dry soul giving it renewal. What is interesting is the geography that is used for the location of the dew. It is dew of Hermon, which is a mountain range located in the far north and straddles the borders of Israel and Lebanon. Mount Zion is located in Jerusalem, which is 99 miles away. Mount Hermon can be snow covered so perhaps it is possible for the dew to stretch down to Zion but it would be very rare.

Michael Kirby, a commentator, states, “It is somehow comforting to find that the blessedness of unity is not presented in a “hearts and flowers” haze of naiveté and perfection, but is seen for what it is: wonderful, messy, unpredictable and rare.” (Feasting on the Word – Year B, Volume 2, Pastoral Perspective – Michael Kirby, 2008, Westminster John Knox Press, p. 390)

When we come together with our different points of views, diverse backgrounds and cultures and unique personalities there maybe tension and unity maybe a struggle. This past year including this week, we have witnessed our nation floundering with finding unity in the midst of political strife, racial unrest and violence. We have seen the results of what disunity can do. It can be devastating.

As Christians, we find ourselves this side of the Easter celebration and the new life that Christ gives to us. We gather to hear the words that Christ is risen. He is risen indeed! Christ overcomes the darkness of death to have a relationship with us so that we will have life now and forevermore. We hear the words of the Psalmist today urging us to be in community with each other. We are called to savor that blessing and rebirth and not hold onto it for just ourselves. We are called to share it with each other and to take it out into our broken world. It is more important now more than ever since we are in the pandemic for us to safely reach out and find ways to live together in unity! It is though we are resurrecting community and life together.

That maybe hard, if you are tending to a sick mother, fighting a disease, needing to still be in quarantine or just feeling overwhelmed with the unknown. Perhaps, that is when you can be on the receiving end of resurrection community.

My father in-law has been living under those circumstances as he has been tending to my mother in-law, who had dementia for the last three to four years. Many of you know that with dementia the person continues to slip away little by little. It is a disease that is different from person to person. As with most care takers, this dementia was not only effecting my mother in-law but it was taking a toll on my father in-law as well. On February 19, we don't really know why but my mother in-law's became very weak and her dementia took a severe turn for the worse. She had her second Covid shot the day before and a week later was diagnosed with sepsis that had gone into her kidneys. The doctors really do not know why this happened and if either of these had an impact. It became clear at this point that after she was released from the hospital that she could not return home.

Over the last fifty days, my father in-law was by her side every day through the hospital stay, the health care facility and then her time in hospice. We are thankful that her suffering as passed as we got word that she died during the night going into yesterday morning. The thing that my father in-law could not get over is the community of support, which he received at the Masonic Home, where there house and healthcare facility are. Jim was called to go and be with his dad on Friday evening. He remarked about all the people on staff, who knew them that had stopped in to say hello, get them a drink and make sure they were comfortable. It was like the oil running down the face and onto the -collar. It was like the dew falling on Mount Zion giving nourishment to the dry land. On Easter Sunday, Jim's dad was able to eat in the dining hall, which he had not been able to do since November. It was only opened to residents but seeing his friends, hearing their voices, and gathering in community together was what he needed to have the strength to weather this storm. And the resurrection community that is greeting my mother in-law, I am sure is quite the celebration and honor as she is welcomed to her eternal home.

Thanks be to God for the Psalmist today reminding us of the importance of living together in unity whether we are giving or receiving it. Amen.