

Merger Sunday

A Celebration of Unity

November 30th, 2025

Psalm 133

Rev. Levi denBok

Good morning! Please turn with me in your Bibles to Psalm 133. Today is a special day, and I think it would be helpful if we took a moment to zoom out. Look with me at the larger picture.

In 1971, approximately ten families from the Brethren movement took a step of faith and planted Simcoside Bible Chapel in the wSouth Ward of Orillia. The church was marked by a deep love for the community, and this love was on full display in their thriving children's ministry. The men and women of Simcoside faithfully served as the hands and feet of Christ to the South Ward of Orillia.

In 2012, First Baptist Church planted Redeemer City Church in the Orillia Christian School gymnasium. Driven by a desire to see the South Ward transformed by the power of the gospel, a group of 30 men and women began worshipping in the Orillia Christian School gymnasium. Many of them sold their houses and moved into the neighbourhood of those they were trying to reach.

The storylines of these two congregations ran parallel until, last Sunday, on November 23rd, 2025, the members of Simcoside and Redeemer held congregational votes to formally merge the two congregations into one. With 85% and 93% approval, the motion to merge has passed!

This is a historic day! I want to make sure that we are clear on this: Neither of these storylines has come to an end. Instead, as we step into this new chapter, the history of both of these congregations has now come together to tell one larger story about God's love for the South Ward. November 23rd, then, was neither an end nor a beginning. It's simply a new chapter to a story that began back in 1971. We now stand together on the shoulders of the faithful men and women whose compassion for this community led us to this moment, and by the grace of God we will continue their legacy.

In coming together, we believe that our witness will shine brighter, and our impact will reach farther than ever before. However, for that to happen, we need more than a congregational vote. We need true unity. To that end, I want to spend our time this morning in Psalm 133. Hear now God's holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today.

A Song of Ascents. Of David.

133 Behold, how good and pleasant it is
when brothers dwell in unity!
² It is like the precious oil on the head,
running down on the beard,
on the beard of Aaron,
running down on the collar of his robes!
³ It is like the dew of Hermon,
which falls on the mountains of Zion!
For there the Lord has commanded the blessing,
life forevermore. (Psalm 133:1-3 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Our passage for this morning is one of the Psalms of Ascent. When Israelite worshippers made their way to Jerusalem for one of the annual holy days, they would sing the psalms as they travelled. You could think of it as something of a shared worship playlist that everyone sang along with on their way to church. This song on the playlist – Psalm 133 – is a celebration of unity.

A Celebration Of Unity

The Psalm is short and simple. There are no complicated nuances to untangle or challenging verbs to parse. David's goal is simply to awaken our hearts to see and appreciate the beauty of unity.

I imagine that there are some in this room who need that awakening. Perhaps you've gradually been cutting people out of your life. Perhaps you're becoming more and more isolated as the years go by. Maybe you've forgotten that we were made by God to live in relationship and you no longer see unity as something to be pursued or celebrated. If that's you, I pray that God would use this Psalm to awaken your heart.

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 12 that no man is an island. We are all members of a larger body. Each of us has been endowed with gifts and – in God’s perfect wisdom – with weaknesses too. We are *strategically deficient*. A Christian CANNOT live as a lone wolf. It is against our design. The triune God made us in His image, therefore a life of isolation is actually *dehumanizing*. We see that in our passage this morning. Look with me again at verse 1:

Behold, how **good** and **pleasant** it is
when brothers dwell in unity! (Psalm 133:1 ESV)

David reminds us here that unity is *good*. There is a moral value to it. There is a *rightness* to it. It corresponds with who we were made to be. The opposite, then, is also true. When brothers and sisters dwell in *disunity* it is BAD. There is a *wrongness* to it. Eugene Peterson cautions:

Scripture knows nothing of the solitary Christian. People of faith are always members of a community.¹

Not only is it objectively *good*, but it is also *experientially pleasant*. There’s a *reason* why people choose to go to live concerts when it would be much less expensive to simply listen to their music at home. It *feels good* – it is *pleasant* – to experience unity. And – if that is true for concert goers – then how much more so is it true for the family of God?!

It is so pleasant for me when I get to stand here and join my voice with all of yours as we praise God together! It feels so good to confess my sin and shortcomings to my church family and to receive your prayer and encouragement. I had so much joy when the men spent a Saturday at the Dutkas helping them to prepare their yard for the winter. It is GOOD and it is PLEASANT because we were made to know and be known.

If you’re still not convinced, consider the prayer that Jesus prayed for his church after the Last Supper. Consider what was foremost on his mind.

“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹ **that they may all be one**, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. (John 17:20-21 ESV)

¹ Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience In The Same Direction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 170.

Before he went to the cross to die for our sin, Jesus prayed for our unity. How good and pleasant it is when we receive and enjoy this gift!

To illustrate the beauty of unity, David evokes two images for us. We find the first image in verse 2 where David writes:

² It is like the precious oil on the head,
 running down on the beard,
on the beard of Aaron,
 running down on the collar of his robes! (Psalm 133:2 ESV)

This imagery is strange to us, but the Israelites would have understood. Aaron was the first high priest, and his ordination as priest was marked by this anointing with oil. As the Israelite imagined Aaron – saturated with anointing oil – they saw a man gifted to them by God to serve as their priest – a man who would minister to them, pray for them, and stand before God on their behalf.

But here's a question: Why would David use *that* imagery – the imagery of the anointing of the priest – to describe the beauty of unity? How do these two things correlate? Eugene Peterson is helpful here. He explains:

Living together means seeing the oil flow over the head, down the face, through the beard, onto the shoulders of the other - and when I see that I know that my brother, my sister, is my priest.²

I think that's something of what David is saying here. 'Look around you! Look at these people! Like Aaron who was set apart to be your priest, these brothers and sisters are God's GIFT to you FOR YOUR GOOD!' I wonder if you see that, Christian? God has specifically and intentionally put the people of this congregation into your life. They are His gift to you! They are here to pray for you – to encourage you – to teach you – to sharpen you – to rejoice and to weep with you!

As we come together in unity, we are surrounded by a *kingdom of priests!* I believe that's what we're meant to see in the first illustration. But let's look now to the second. We find it in verse 3:

² Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience In The Same Direction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 175.

³ It is like the dew of Hermon,
which falls on the mountains of Zion! (Psalm 133:3a ESV)

Mount Hermon was situated far to the north, and it was well known for its abundant dew. But mount Zion was in the south, in a dry and arid place. How could the dew of Hermon bring life to Zion? If dew from Hermon were falling on the mountains of Zion, that would be unexpected. In fact, it would be miraculous!

I think that the picture that David is illustrating here is meant to convey that – when we come together – we bring one another unexpected blessings. Perhaps you are in a dry season this morning. Left to yourself, you would continue to languish. But God – in His wisdom and mercy – has surrounded you with brothers and sisters who are dripping with the dew of mount Hermon! Like the priest whose beard drips with the oil of anointing, these brothers and sisters are a gift to you to bring refreshment and sustenance! David concludes:

For there the Lord has commanded the blessing,
life forevermore. (Psalm 133:3b ESV)

THERE – in UNITY – the Lord has commanded the blessing. Not in isolation. Not in competition. Not in division. When God's people pursue, delight in and maintain unity, there is blessing and life forevermore.

But, if that's true, then why are Christians so often divided? Why do churches split? Why do relationships rupture?

The sad reality is that you and I are sinners, and we live in a fallen world. That means that the unity that David is celebrating in Psalm 133 is not something that we can simply take for granted in the days to come. It will need to be fought for. It will need to be guarded. It will need to be maintained. To that end, I want to turn to God's word and to ask this important, practical question:

What Will Ongoing Unity Require?

First, the Bible clearly teaches that ongoing unity will require:

1. Clarity

We need to stay crystal clear on what our unity is centered upon. We're not simply *friends with a common interest*. We are *brothers and sisters in Christ with a common purpose*. If we're going to maintain this unity, then we need to be clear about that. Our unity here is centered upon the gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul wrote to the Ephesians:

There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— ⁵ one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶ one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. (Ephesians 4:4-6 ESV)

This is why we have a statement of faith that clearly articulates our shared understanding of the gospel. This is why we have a process of membership whereby we sit down together and make sure that we are in full agreement about the gospel that we proclaim. We have put these clarifying tools in place – not to divide us – but to ensure that we are all walking in the same direction. As the prophet Amos asked:

Do two walk together
unless they have agreed to do so? (Amos 3:3 NIV)

If we want to maintain our unity, then we need to have clear and honest conversations about where we are going. We will also need to have clear and honest conversations if any of us start to veer off the agreed upon path. Without real clarity, we will never enjoy real unity.

Second, ongoing unity will require:

2. Proximity

We see this in Hebrews 10:24-25. There, we read:

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ **not neglecting to meet together**, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near. (Hebrews 10:24-25 ESV)

At the risk of being accused of legalism, I want to say this clearly: A church filled with congregants who only attend once or twice a month will never enjoy true unity. It just doesn't work like that. No sport team enjoys chemistry if they don't practice together, no band achieves harmony if they don't practice together, and no church will enjoy unity if they don't worship together.

Read through church history and try to find any other historical moment when the people of God thought it was healthy to neglect corporate worship. Spoiler alert: You won't find it! Christians have always understood this self-evident truth: We cannot be united if we are never together! In Acts 2, we read:

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. (Acts 2:42 ESV)

'But, pastor, are you suggesting that I should skip sports that fall on Sunday mornings?' YES!
'Are you suggesting that I should plan weekend getaways with enough time to get back to church?' YES! 'Are you suggesting that it's not healthy for me to only attend corporate worship twice a month?' YES! 'But isn't that legalism?'

No.

It would be legalism if I said that in order to be saved you need to come to church every Sunday. I'm not saying that. But what I AM saying, is that every time you prioritize something else over coming together with God's people for worship, you hurt us, you hurt yourself, and you hurt our unity. Ongoing unity will require proximity.

And, third, it will require:

3. Honesty

As we step into this new chapter together, I don't want to paint an unrealistic picture of the future. The reality is – if you stay here long enough – every single person in this room is going to step on

your toe eventually. Sometimes it will be accidental. Sometimes it will be intentional. And sometimes, it will be a bit of both. John Piper wisely encourages us:

We need to forgive *sin* and forebear *strangeness*, and sometimes you won't even agree on which is which.³

Some of the things that will bother us will simply be *strangeness*. Perhaps someone will make a joke that rubs you the wrong way. Perhaps someone will assume wrong motives in your comment and take offense. People are strange.

And, unfortunately, some of the things that will bother us will be sin. Perhaps someone will lose their temper with you and say things that should never have been said. Perhaps someone will gossip about you and do damage to your reputation that they can't undo. People are sinful.

People are strange and sinful. And we're all people, so we can all be equally offended by that.

The question, then, is not 'Will people step on my toes?' They will. The real question is: 'How will I respond when that happens?' Will you pick up your toys and march out of the sandbox? Will you silently fester over your anger? Will you gossip with your friends? If we would enjoy unity in this place, then we need to say 'no' to those childish options and we need to commit ourselves to honesty. I'm drawing this from Jesus' teaching in Matthew 18. There, he said:

If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. (Matthew 18:15 ESV)

We are commanded by Jesus to keep short accounts with one another. I can tell you, the most meaningful relationships in my life are the ones I have with people who have seen the worst of me, and who have loved me enough to speak honestly with me about my sin. And, in most of those relationships, I've had opportunity to return the favor! That's what real Christian unity looks like! Dietrich Bonhoeffer once wrote:

³ John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 53.

When the morning mists of dreams vanish, then dawns the bright day of Christian fellowship.⁴

Real unity is only possible when our idealized dream of a perfect church comes crashing down. It's only when we see one another honestly, and when we are willing to speak honestly into what we see, that unity becomes possible. As Proverbs 27 says:

Better is open rebuke
than hidden love.

⁶Faithful are the wounds of a friend; (Proverbs 27:5-6 ESV)

Fourth, and related to what we've just covered, ongoing unity will require:

4. Charity

Yes, I need to be honest about the sin and shortcomings that I see in my brothers and sisters. Yes.

BUT. I FIRST need to deal honestly with myself. Was that *really* sin? Or am I being overly sensitive? Was that *really* sin? Or am I assuming wrong motives? The Apostle Paul teaches us that one of the defining marks of Christian love is that:

Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (1 Corinthians 13:7 ESV)

Christian love BELIEVES all things. It assumes the BEST in others. If we're going to maintain unity, then we need to fight against our desire to rush to offense. Maybe that person was having a really hard day. Maybe you misheard them. Maybe the leadership had more information than you when they made that decision. Maybe your opinion is mistaken.

Or maybe you're correct and you have every reason to be irritated. But, in the words of the Apostle Paul: Why not rather be wronged? I've come to love this quote by Richard Sibbes:

⁴ Dietrich Bonhoeffer as quoted by John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009), 62.

It would be a good contest amongst Christians, one to labour to give no offense, and the other to labour to take none.⁵

The ability to overlook an offense is a wonderful mark of Christian maturity. People who love being offended and who fester in their unforgiveness rob the church of spiritual power. If you think that sounds like an over exaggeration, just listen to what Paul told the church in Ephesus:

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. ³² Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you. (Ephesians 4:30-32 ESV)

When we are unkind and unforgiving, we GRIEVE the Holy Spirit. Ongoing unity will require charity. It will also require:

5. Humility

In Ephesians 2, the Apostle Paul provides us with a clear and powerful description of humility. He writes:

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but **in humility count others more significant than yourselves**. ⁴ Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. (Ephesians 2:3-4 ESV)

As we merge these two congregations together, humility will save us from a world of conflict. If we all navigate through this next year asking the question, ‘What do I want? How can I make sure that MY preferences are met?’ then we are in for a tough stretch.

But if, instead, we all ask, ‘What can I do to bless and encourage the people around me?’ we will be well on our way to a sweet unity in this place. By the grace of God and with the help of His Spirit, let’s choose to put the needs and preferences of others above our own.

This is, after all, the example that Jesus set for us. Paul goes on to write in Ephesians 2:

⁵ Richard Sibbes, *The Bruised Reed* (Carlisle, PA: The Banner Of Truth Trust, 1630, 1998), 26.

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,⁶ who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped,⁷ but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men.⁸ And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. (Ephesians 2:5-7 ESV)

If Jesus could leave his heavenly throne and exchange it for a manger, then surely I can lay down my preferences in order to serve my fellow brothers and sisters. If he could suffer on that cross to pay for my sin, then surely I can humble myself to suffer through minor inconveniences for the sake of his people. There can be no unity where there is not humility.

Finally, if we want to maintain unity in this place, then above all else we must prioritize:

6. Love

Do you love God? Then you will increasingly learn to love his people. That's not just my opinion, by the way. That is a non-negotiable mark of the Christian. It's not uncommon to hear people say things like, 'I love Jesus, but I hate the church.' Well – according to the Bible – that is literally impossible! The Apostle John writes:

If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for **he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.** (1 John 4:20 ESV)

Like it or not, as one scholar writes:

If God is my father, then this is my family.⁶

Christian, THIS is your family! And if you love the Father, then you will love His kids. Even the kids who step on your toes and grate on your nerves.

Nearly three years of hard work went into the vote that we held last Sunday. But, brothers and sisters, the real work begins NOW. Passing a vote was easy. But walking together in unity in the days to come will be a church-wide challenge.

⁶ Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience In The Same Direction* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1980), 170.

But, from the bottom of my heart, I believe that this group is going to rise to that challenge. And, as we do, our ongoing unity will preach a sermon to the community around us. Isn't that what Jesus taught us? He said:

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another.³⁵ **By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.** (John 13:34-35 ESV)

As we conclude, I want to invite you to consider those six categories again and invite the Holy Spirit to bring conviction and growth where it is needed.

Ongoing unity will require clarity. Are you clear on the gospel that unites us? Or are you inclined to fight and divide over secondary matters?

Ongoing unity will require proximity. Have you been isolating yourself? Have you deprioritized corporate worship?

Ongoing unity will require honesty. Do you harbour grudges? Are you becoming a gossip? Are you afraid to have difficult conversations?

Ongoing unity will require charity. Do you assume the best in others? Are you able to forgive even when you don't experience the resolution you hoped for?

Ongoing unity will require humility. Have you allowed selfishness to take root in your heart? Do you spend more time thinking about what you want instead of what others need?

Ongoing unity will require love. Do you love God, and do you love His people? Has your heart grown cold over the years?

Ongoing unity will require each and every one of us to look honestly at ourselves and to grow degree by degree into the likeness of Jesus. To that end, let's pray together and ask for His help.