

# “Called to Be United”

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Psalm 133 & Ephesians 4:1-6

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How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!

Psalm 133 is a lovely little Psalm. It is a Psalm of Ascents — that is a Psalm that people recited or sang as they journeyed to Jerusalem for one of the annual festivals. Of course, people went on pilgrimage as a family and it was an occasion for extended families to come together. This Psalm speaks to the unity in families and it expands to unity in nations. Unity is so wonderful and rich ... it is like expensive oil lavishly poured out. It is like the dew from Mount Hermon falling on Zion.

Now that last comparison is a little odd because Mount Hermon is a mountain in the northern kingdom about 200 km north of Jerusalem. You might remember that after King Solomon (Saul, David, Solomon) there is a huge division in the 12 tribes of Israel. The north splits from the south and refuses to bow down to the new king, Solomon's son. The division was never really healed. In Jesus' day the Samaritans were from the northern kingdom — they were related but with no love between them, and they drew further and further apart in religion and culture. So this Psalm and the verse about the dew of Mount Hermon falling on Mount Zion speaks about the unity among individuals but it also expands to a dream of a reunification of a nation — united to celebrate God.

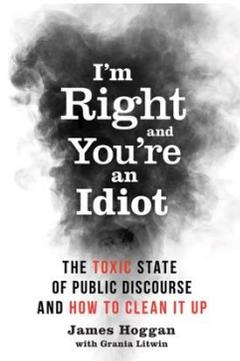
Unfortunately, then and now, there seems to be so much more division than there is unity.

I could bring up any number of topics: vaccine passports, climate change, immigration, education, organ music vs drums and guitars, Leafs vs Habs ... you name it. In this room of — relatively speaking — like-minded people, I could say “pineapple on pizza — discuss” and we could start some good debates that would leave us feeling like we thought we liked that person, but now we're not so sure. Just wait for Thanksgiving next week and see what important and stupid debates you end up having with the people you eat with. We could talk about our differences for a very long time.

Divisions are easy. Unity is much, much more difficult.

The mistake we often make in trying to achieve unity is that we get very stuck in our own way of seeing the world and we don't understand why

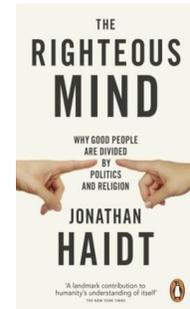
others don't see things our way. So to help those people understand, we say it louder and with more facts — and when that doesn't work, we blame those people. I heard a great book title the other day that sums it all up: '*I'm Right and You're an Idiot!*' What a brilliant title! I haven't read it, but it says what we often feel.



The psychologist Jonathan Haidt wrote a book I have read called '*The Righteous Mind*'.

It's a little dense but he helps to explain why we are so polarized in politics and religion and why it is difficult to change someone's

mind about anything. He uses an image of a rider on an elephant to explain the challenge. The rider is reason or the rational mind and the elephant is our values, emotions and intuition.



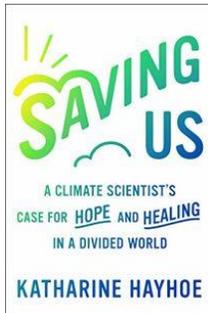
For the most part when you are riding an elephant you go where the elephant wants to go. Instead of actually directing and controlling the elephant, mostly the rider (the rational part of us) serves to justify why you are going in that direction. We act, we believe and then we justify and rationalize that choice. The rider/rational part of us does have some influence on the way we think, behave and vote — but we way, way, way overestimate its influence.

In my lifetime there has been a very clear belief that education equals salvation — if we just educate people and give them the right information they will be transformed into better and more enlightened people. But while education helps, on difficult issues like encouraging a population to be vaccinated or helping people and governments to change their behaviour to fight climate change, it's pretty clear that education has its limits. Even with information people will refuse to change their mind.

And if you are feeling smug and enlightened right now — if you are so glad you are not one of those people who doesn't let information change their behaviour, I want you to think of something in your own life that you know you should change but you still haven't. You know that you would be healthier if you eliminated fast food and processed food from your diet. You know you would be healthier if you stopped smoking. You know that you would feel better if you exercised for 30 minutes a day, went to bed earlier, got counselling for that past trauma, or left that abusive relationship. I'd be willing to bet that there is something you know with your head you should do, but actually getting that elephant (that is you!) to do what you know you

should do is a whole other story!

Haidt argues that if we want to change another person we need to appeal not to their rational part, by giving them articles and a good debate, but instead appeal to their elephant — the values that they are operating from.



I just started reading *Saving Us* by Katharine Hayhoe, a wonderful and very readable book.

She agrees with Jonathan Haidt.

She is a Canadian climate scientist, married to an evangelical pastor, living in Texas. Interesting combination eh? Katharine gets a lot of hate mail and she has learned that there are not really 2 kinds of people. She figures there are 6 kinds. When it comes to the topic of Climate Change about 7% are what she calls “dismissives”. I bet it’s true on other issues too. The 7% are dug-in and vocal. She says there is no point arguing with them or spending your energy on them because so much of their identity is wrapped up in denying Climate Change.

The other 93% are a different story. She divides them into the Doubtful, the Disengaged, the Cautious, the Concerned and the Alarmed. You can do a lot to make a difference to the 93%. But she is still very careful how she does that. Katharine is keenly aware that if you want to win over a Texan to support climate action, you don’t use jargon that will turn them off. Instead, she argues you begin with what you have in common. You talk about your shared values. In Texas having enough water is a big issue and so you start there.

What strikes me about both Jonathan and Katharine’s approach is that it starts with understanding the other person. When you recognize you need to meet another person where they are in order to influence them, you have to go deeper and make a bigger effort to listen and understand who they are. This is so often missing. When we talk about unity we tend to think, how can I get others to see things my way? How can I get others to understand me? We most often want to start with ‘me’. As in “but enough about me, what do you think about me?”

Last week Christina Whyte read the Prayer of St. Francis, and Samia sang it. The second half of the prayer goes like this:

O divine Master, grant that I may never seek  
So much to be consoled as to console,  
to be understood as to understand,

to be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive,  
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,  
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

In our scripture reading from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, Paul begs them to make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. How? To live with humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing one another in love.

Humility, gentleness, patience, bearing one another in love. Those are all qualities that have an eye and a heart open to the other. Humility says "I could be wrong, you might be right", gentleness, patience— oh my, there is so much anger out there. With all the changes the truth is there is so much anger in here when we feel like we are losing control. Bearing with one another in love. Make every effort. Bearing with one another. Paul knows it's not easy, but it's worth the effort, because people matter more than issues, because God loves you so very much and God loves that relative of yours, that person who offended you, that person who sees the world differently than you.

Unity: how very good and pleasant. I want to remind you that unity is not uniformity. God is not calling us to be the same. God created a wonderfully diverse world and amazingly diverse people. Even within the church Paul reminds us that we all have different gifts and talents and that the body of Christ, which is the church, is made up of many different parts. We honour and celebrate the differences and diversity. Diversity is what makes the world beautiful and rich ... it's also what makes it hard to get along with each other.

In our life and as a church we are called to come closer to one another and closer to God. Psalm 133 is a psalm recited on the pilgrimage to Jerusalem, but we are all on a journey of life and the purpose of this pilgrimage is to draw closer and closer to God and closer and closer to one another.

But God is not just passively waiting for us to come to him. Once upon a time God, along with Moses, wrote the instructions on stone, but later God would write them on our hearts. God became a human, in the form of Jesus, and Jesus did not spend his time yelling from rooftops and arguing with twits on Twitter, (though he was not afraid to stand up to powerful people like the religious leaders!)

Instead, Jesus came in humility, bringing the message of God's

transforming love in small and unassuming ways and to ordinary people. We, as the church, became that message and love letter from God to a broken world. “And you show that you are a letter of Christ, prepared by us, written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.”

2 Corinthians 3:3.

*Filled with love and humility, let us bring to others the message of the transforming love of God.*

Thanks be to God. Amen.