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'Mountain Dew'

Rev. Dr. Kimberly Heath
Wall Street United Church

The recent wildfires in Kelowna and Yellowknife and the Northwest Territories have caused unprecedented havoc and destruction. As I was listening to the radio this past week, they interviewed the mayor of Yellowknife. The host asked, "What do you need from the rest of the country?" In his response, he said how good the federal government has been, how helpful Alberta has been, how all levels of government have been stepping up to the plate to help. It was so refreshing to hear about the cooperation! Now I am mindful that in situations of mass trauma people are initially brought together. As people seek survival and safety, the experience is unifying. People from outside come to help and people inside go out of their way to help one another. But the incredibly long journey of recovery from a societal level trauma like this tends to divide people in the longer term. It is important that we pray for the people of Yellowknife and Kelowna and the NWT not just now in the crisis, but also during the long road to recovery.

It was refreshing in the interview to hear about the unity and cooperation. I wish that unity could be seen not just in times of crisis. *"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, on 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."* (Psalm 133)

Unity. It's rare and rich like precious oil, it's refreshing like a mountain dew. Psalm 133 is a beautiful short 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. 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 that the psalm compares it to expensive oil, lavishly poured out ... and to the dew from Mount Hermon falling on Zion, flowing down to Jerusalem and the city of God.

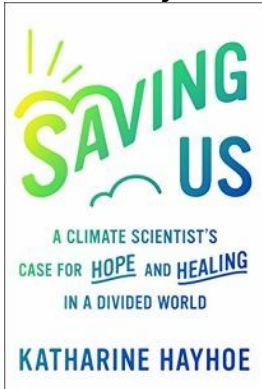
Now that sounds lovely, except Mount Hermon is a mountain in the northern kingdom about 200 km north of Jerusalem. You might remember that after the reign of King Solomon (King David's son), there is a huge division in the 12 tribes of Israel. The north splits from the south and refuses to bow down to the new king, Solomon's son. The division was never really healed. In Jesus' day the Samaritans were from the northern kingdom — they were distantly related to those in the south, but with no love between them, 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 the reunification of a nation — united to celebrate God.

Divisions are easy. Unity is much, more difficult. At some level we all long for unity, for connection, for belonging. *How* we achieve it is sometimes a problem. We like to achieve it through hanging out with like-minded people. If you can't get along or agree with everyone out there, then we just focus on this small place of similar people. It's a

form of tribalism. The Old Testament was literally tribal.

Tribalism today often centers around politics and ideologies. Especially the influence coming from the U.S. of being on the right or being on the left. That's a big one — and it permeates so much how we approach just about any issue. But it's not just politics. People have always been drawn to similar interests. Thanks to the internet you can have a pretty obscure interest and find others with that very same interest. If you are on the internet, you probably do belong to a group that 30 years ago would have been unlikely. I belong to two Bichon Frise groups. (My frizzy white puppy Opal is the real McCoy!) I only know one other Bichon in town, and there's probably more, but on the internet there are thousands of us. People can form their lives around particular interests, for example, RVing or kayaking, quilting, pot-bellied pigs or polka music...the possibilities are endless! You are instantly part of the group and united because of that shared interest.

It used to be that people were united by family or geography, but now neither of those are needed. It's easy to find a tribe of people who have the same niche interest that you do. Those identities are key for us. A couple of days ago my daughter Maisie went shopping with her older siblings in Ottawa and found an anime store—anime is Japanese hand-drawn cartoons that are then computer generated. Maisie told me that Anna thought the store was creepy. I asked Maisie if she thought it was creepy and she said “No way, those are my people!” Unity in identity! So, one way to find unity is to find and stick to people just like us. The other way to achieve unity is to try to make people like us. Of course, we don't think of it like that, it's more that we want others to understand our world view and why our world view is a good one to have. So, we share and argue and defend our positions. There is a feeling that if we just argue it well enough, people will unite.



I follow Rev. Jessica Hetherington's blog called: *Faith. Climate Crisis. Action.* and this week she reminded me of the book *Saving Us* by Katharine Hayhoe, a wonderful and very readable book. Hayhoe is a Canadian climate scientist, married to an evangelical pastor, living in Texas. Interesting combination eh? Those are very different tribes and identities. Canadian Climate Scientist combined with evangelical in Texas! That's oil and water. That's a modern-day miracle. That's not a union that you are likely to come across. The subtitle of her book is “**A climate scientist's case for hope and healing in a divided world.**” That's an interesting subtitle. She

believes that if there was less division perhaps there would be more hope for saving the planet. So, she takes a different approach.

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. You can do a lot to make a difference to the 93%. But she is still very careful how she does that. She writes: “Bombarding people with more data, facts, and

science isn't the key to convincing others of why climate change matters and how important and urgent it is that we fix it. Instead, when we're talking about contentious, politicized issues, study after study has shown that sharing our personal and lived experience is far more compelling than reeling off distant facts."

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 says 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. The book is very hopeful, and it is truly refreshing. What strikes me about 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?**"

In our scripture reading from Paul's letter to the Ephesians, (Ephesians 4:1-6) 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**. *I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace: there is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.*

Humility, gentleness, patience, bearing one another in love. Sounds just like X—the platform formerly known as Twitter—right? Wrong. You want to be counter cultural? Humility, gentleness, patience, bearing one another in love. That is our call. Those are all qualities that have an eye and a heart open to the others.

Humility says "I could be wrong; you might be right." **Patience** says "Make every effort." Bearing with one another takes effort! 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. 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.

It reminds me of that old story of the man who found someone about to jump off a bridge. Here is how he tells the story: *Once I saw this guy on a bridge about to jump. I said, "Don't do it!" He said, "Nobody loves me." I said, "God loves you. Do you believe in God?" He said, "Yes." I said, "Are you a Christian or a Jew?" He said, "A Christian." I*

said, “Me, too! Protestant or Catholic?” He said, “Protestant.” I said, “Me, too! What franchise?” He said, “Baptist.” I said, “Me, too! Northern Baptist or Southern Baptist?” He said, “Northern Baptist.” I said, “Me, too! Northern Conservative Baptist or Northern Liberal Baptist?”

He said, “Northern Conservative Baptist.” I said, “Me, too! Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region, or Northern Conservative Baptist Eastern Region?” He said, “Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region.” I said, “Me, too!” Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1879, or Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1912?” He said, “Northern Conservative Baptist Great Lakes Region Council of 1912.” I said, “Die, heretic!” And I pushed him over.

Unity: how very good and pleasant! It is like expensive, fragrant oil running down; it is like refreshing dew falling on a mountain. We long for true unity. Friends, there is nothing wrong with having affinity groups but you’re not going to satisfy that need to be connected or to truly belong that way. And God’s vision for unity is so, so much bigger than our vision. When we are **deeply rooted** and connected first to the One who created us, an incredible thing happens: it **leads us to connecting to others** — to seeing others as also made in the image of God. It **helps us to relax in our differences** because our unity comes from a deeper place. 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 **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 connect to him.

Once upon a time God reached out and connected to us through a particular group of people. God loves the particular, but the vision was never just for one, but for all. The **vision** was **always bigger** than one group of people; bigger than one tribe; bigger than 12 tribes. God became a human, in the form of Jesus. Jesus, as it says in Philippians, ‘emptied himself’. He let go of his God identity and became human so he could be united with us. Jesus did not spend his time yelling from rooftops and arguing with idiots on Facebook about the right way to worship God, (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—even to people who were not in his natural or native affinity groups. He connected and ate with Samaritans, with tax collectors, with pharisees, with women, with men. Was that message ever healing and precious and refreshing!

The early church became that refreshing message and love from God to a broken world. A message that said there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer male or female, *there is no longer slave or free — for all are one in Christ*. May we be people who bring that rare and refreshing gift of leaning in and understanding others. May we hold onto the dream of a world united because everyone is created in the image of God. And may you know you belong, and that nothing can separate you from the family of God.

Thanks be to God. Amen.