

John 20:19-23

Psalm 133

Peace in Community

Sermon

Hobart, April 12th, 2015

Devonport, April 18th, 2015

Launceston, April 19th, 2015

John 20:19-23

¹⁹ That Sunday evening* the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! “Peace be with you,” he said. ²⁰ As he spoke, he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord! ²¹ Again he said, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.” ²² Then he breathed on them and said, “Receive the Holy Spirit. ²³ If you forgive anyone’s sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.”¹

Psalm 133

A song for pilgrims ascending to Jerusalem. A psalm of David.

¹ How wonderful and pleasant it is
when brothers live together in harmony!
² For harmony is as precious as the anointing oil
that was poured over Aaron’s head,
that ran down his beard
and onto the border of his robe.
³ Harmony is as refreshing as the dew from Mount
Hermon
that falls on the mountains of Zion.
And there the LORD has pronounced his blessing,
even life everlasting.²

* Greek *In the evening of that day, the first day of the week.*

¹Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Jn 20:19-31). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

²Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (Ps 133:1-3). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

INTRODUCTION:

I. FEAR AND LONELINESS

A. FEAR AND LONELINESS ARE TWO OF THE MOST COMMON EXPERIENCES OF OUR MODERN AGE

1. In an age when there are so many physical means of protection, with sophisticated locks, security systems, police, and medical expertise, we are increasingly fearful

2. In a time when there are more people on earth, we more lonely than ever.

3. As the Beatles' song, Eleanor Rigby goes,

Ah, look at all the lonely people!
Ah, look at all the lonely people!

Eleanor Rigby picks up the rice
In the church where a wedding has been
Lives in a dream
Waits at the window
Wearing the face that she keeps in a jar by the door
Who is it for?

All the lonely people
Where do they all come from?
All the lonely people
Where do they all belong? ³

4. Dr Vince Berger writes about loneliness;

According to a recent national survey, 25% of all adults experience painful loneliness at least every few weeks, and the incidence among adolescents and college students is even higher. Loneliness is neither a permanent state nor "bad" in itself. Instead it should be viewed more accurately as a signal or indicator of important needs that are going unmet.⁴

³ Lennon-McCartney, EMI, 1966

⁴ Dr. Vince Berger, *Loneliness*,
http://www.psychologistanywhereanytime.com/relationships_psychologist/psychologist_loneliness.htm

5. According to a BBC *Healthcheck* article; *Why Does Being Lonely Make You Ill*,

Loneliness is thought to be rising around the world and how often you see friends and family could have a significant effect on health.

Doctors have known for some time that loneliness is bad for the mind. It leads to mental health problems like depression, stress, anxiety, and a lack of confidence.

But there's growing evidence that social isolation is connected with an increased risk of physical ill health as well.

There are suggestions it can make some diseases both more likely to occur and more likely to be fatal.

In 2006, a study of 2,800 women who had breast cancer showed those who saw few friends or family were as much as five times more likely to die of their disease than women with many social contacts.

... people who are socially isolated develop changes in their immune system, which leads to a condition called chronic inflammation. ... in the long-term it can contribute towards cardiovascular disease and cancer.

...scientists found that lonely people find everyday activities more stressful than those who are not socially isolated.

...Lonely people released more cortisol. The scientists suggest that too much of the hormone causes inflammation and disease.⁵

6. And of course fearfulness and other anxieties are known to cause similar problems, including depression.

7. As we study our passages today, in Psalm 133 and John 20, let's see how they can help us and others with life issues like these;

B. PRAYER

⁵ Deborah Cohen, Why does being lonely make you ill?, Health Check, BBC World Service 23 February 2013; <http://www.bbc.com/news/health-21517864>

BODY:

II. JOHN 20:19-23

A. AFTER JESUS' DEATH, THE FOLLOWERS OF JESUS WERE IN SHOCK, AND IN FEAR.

1. They felt alone in the world, abandoned, grief stricken
2. Their hopes, their direction and meaning in life, their everyday expectations were all shattered
3. Additionally they were in fear that the authorities would seize and take them as well

JOHN 20:19-23

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B. THERE IS A LOT HAPPENING HERE

1. The most obvious solution to their fear and loneliness is Jesus
 - a) But there is also another important aspect;
 - b) The fact that those with a common need and problem had themselves gathered together

¹⁹ That Sunday evening* the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders.

2. Initially they had scattered in fear
 - a) But during the Sunday of the resurrection they have gradually come back together

* Greek *In the evening of that day, the first day of the week.*

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- b) The women had gone to the garden and found the tomb empty, and Jesus had appeared to them
- c) Two of them had been on their way home when Jesus met them on the road to Emmaus
- d) Peter had subsequently gone to the tomb and Jesus had appeared to him as well

C. ANOTHER SCRIPTURE THAT IS TRADITIONALLY READ THIS FIRST SUNDAY AFTER EASTER IS PSALM 133

- 1. This is one of the Psalms of Ascent, sung during the pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Passover season

Psalm 133:1

¹ How wonderful and pleasant it is
when brothers live together in harmony!

- 2. This related to the coming together of the members of the Jewish community at the festival times to fellowship together and worship God
 - a) This is who God is, a communal God who wants us to be in fellowship with him through worship
 - b) And to be together with others in doing so
 - (1) God doesn't want us to be alone, separate from him or alone, separate from others, especially those who are part of the community of faith and worship

3. Harmony

- a) Harmony is the opposite of strife, and division
 - (1) It is related to peace, shalom, which is well being
 - (2) The opposite of fear and loneliness, of anxiety and division

² For harmony is as precious as the anointing oil
that was poured over Aaron's head,
that ran down his beard
and onto the border of his robe.

³ Harmony is as refreshing as the dew from Mount Hermon that falls on the mountains of Zion.
And there the LORD has pronounced his blessing, even life everlasting.

4. Bible Knowledge Commentary;

The picture of oil running down (v 2) no doubt suggested dew coming down from Mount **Hermon** in the north onto **Mount Zion**. The dew of Hermon was heavy; it symbolized what was freshening and invigorating. The refreshing influence of the worshiping community on the nation was similar to the dew on vegetation. This was a fitting symbol of the Lord's **blessing** on His people.⁶

D. SO WE SEE IN JOHN 19

1. The blessing of the presence of the Lord with his people who are gathered together

a) Jesus' resurrection—his being back with them—brings them peace

JOHN 20:19

¹⁹ That Sunday evening* the disciples were meeting behind locked doors because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. Suddenly, Jesus was standing there among them! "Peace be with you," he said.

2. *Peace* means, things being put back to the way they should be

a) Loneliness, the sense of fear and abandonment, of hopelessness is overcome because they now have a better sense of the hope and reality that Jesus brings to them

3. They see a way out of their darkness and confusion into the light and hope that is in Jesus

a) And they share it together

⁶Walvoord, J. F., Zuck, R. B., & Dallas Theological Seminary. (1983-c1985). *The Bible knowledge commentary: An exposition of the scriptures* (888). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

* Greek *In the evening of that day, the first day of the week.*

JOHN 20:20

²⁰ As he spoke, he showed them the wounds in his hands and his side. They were filled with joy when they saw the Lord! ²¹ Again he said, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you." ²² Then he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit.

E. TWO BENEFITS OF THEIR BEING TOGETHER

1. One is the solidarity, support and joy they received from Jesus, and from one another as a spiritually supportive group
2. The second is what they are being equipped to do as a group, and the benefit they will be to others
3. This is all now enabled by the presence of God the Holy Spirit

F. THIS IS THE LIFE OF GOD

1. The Father, Son and Spirit are one
 - a) They live in perfect harmony, in the unity and peace Psalm 133 describes
 - b) They love and support one another
2. As one, God sent the Son, and the Son sends us the Spirit
 - a) All for the furtherance of his purpose, of his kingdom
 - (1) His plan to bring all people into harmony and unity with himself, through the Son and the work of the Spirit
 - (2) To bring the blessing of life everlasting that we read of at the end of Psalm 133;

Psalm 133:3

³ Harmony is as refreshing as the dew from Mount Hermon that falls on the mountains of Zion.
And there the LORD has pronounced his blessing,
even life everlasting.

3. In the room in Jerusalem, Jesus fulfils this;

- a) He is the blessing—he blesses the disciples with his presence, and his ongoing presence through the Holy Spirit
- b) and that brings them great joy and relief
- c) And also hope and purpose for the future
 - (1) They are no longer going to be alone
 - (2) They no longer need to fear

G. JESUS WASN'T GOING TO PHYSICALLY STAY WITH THEM

- 1. But he wasn't going to leave them alone, he was sending them the Comforter, the Paraclete
 - a) The one who stands with us, and guides and supports us
 - b) Who is our companion in times when we feel alone and helpless, and who is our strength, assurance and guide when we feel fearful, overwhelmed and lost

H. PSALM 133 REFLECTS THIS COMMUNITY LIFE

- 1. A life that is good and harmonious,
 - a) That has the blessings and presence of God

¹ How wonderful and pleasant it is

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- 2. Ron Allen gives a helpful overview of Psalm 133, and how it focuses on the good of community, of the communion of God's pilgrim people.

The nature of the community is represented by a double meaning in the oil—practicing hospitality and anointing a priest. The community epitomizes ancient hospitality, and is priestly in the way in its function in the world.

3. The anointing also pictures God’s blessing and setting apart of people to be his agents, his people in blessing others.

a) In this instance the High Priest.

(1) Jesus is our High Priest, the one who brings God’s blessings to us, and sets us apart, anoints us with his Spirit to be his people in this lonely and fearful world

4. Jesus and the Holy Spirit refresh us when we are in need, when we feel alone or afraid

a) They revive us and equip us to be a blessing to those around us, to bring harmony and peace, to help set things right

5. Allen continues;

The psalm was intended to refresh the pilgrims’ sense of being part of a true community in which all members are connected with one another and support one another. Singing the Songs of Ascent (Psalm 120-134), pilgrims should become oriented being in Jerusalem as true community. The larger community is the true home of the many households that make up Israel.

This idea is reinforced when we recognize that the word “good” is the Hebrew *tov* which recurs in the refrain in Genesis 1, “And God saw that it was good.” The psalm echoes Genesis and its vision that God intends for all elements of creation to live together in mutual support. The qualities of life of Genesis 1 should characterize distinct households as well as the life of Israel as community. This life in partnership with God is the “life of blessing forevermore.”

Christians sometimes speak of “unity” in the mode of “uniformity.” In the Psalm, however, the unity is not sameness. “Unity” refers to shared relational purpose—to live together in ways that are mutually supportive while (consistent with God’s purposes in Genesis 1) which includes honoring the distinctiveness and integrity of each living thing.⁷

⁷ Ron Allen, Second Sunday Of Easter, April 12, 2015, <http://processandfaith.org/resources/lectionary-commentary/yearb/2015-04-12/second-sunday-easter>

I. ALLEN IS BRINGING OUT SIMILAR POINTS ABOUT COMMUNITY TO THOSE IN JOHN 20

1. Our gathering together as God's people is a blessing in many ways
2. It reminds us of who we are together in Christ
 - a) We are anointed, set apart, and blessed to be like him through the Holy Spirit being with us
 - b) We are anointed, set apart, and blessed to live and share the good, the wonderful, the joy, the peace, the blessings of God's life
3. As Allen says, this unity and goodness has a relational purpose
 - a) Living in mutually dependent and co-operative ways
 - (1) Supporting, adding to the life of those we share life with in family, church and the community
 - (2) Living with each other and the environment in a way that helps restore the goodness, the way of life God created in the beginning
 - b) Again, this is what shalom/peace really means
 - (1) As Tom Wright terms it, setting things to rights.
 - (2) Restoring our lives and the live of the world we interact with on a daily basis right again, as much as we are able to
4. Part of dealing with what is wrong in relationships is what Jesus brings up next in John 20;

J. FORGIVENESS

²³ If you forgive anyone's sins, they are forgiven. If you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."

1. This is a large and vital topic
 2. How does forgiveness fit into the context of what we are focused on today in John 20 and Psalm 133?
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CONCLUSION:

K. DR. VINCE BERGER DESCRIBES LONELINESS AS:

...an emotional state in which a person experiences a powerful feeling of emptiness and isolation. Loneliness is more than just the feeling of wanting company or wanting to do something with another person. Loneliness is a feeling of being cut off, disconnected, and/or alienated from other people, so that it feels difficult or even impossible to have any form of meaningful human contact. Lonely people often feel empty or hollow inside.⁸

L. WE HAVE SEE IN JESUS' APPEARANCE TO THE LONELY AND FEARFUL DISCIPLES

1. That Jesus and the Holy Spirit refresh us when we are in need, when we feel alone or afraid
2. They revive us and equip us to be a blessing to those around us, to bring harmony and peace, to help set things right

M. AS PSALM 133 EMPHASISES

1. That the good and pleasant life of God comes in community
2. It is in the community of the Church that we both give and receive comfort and support
3. Through the ongoing presence of Jesus and the Holy Spirit, we are healed and nourished
 - a) We grow in unity and love with God and one another
4. From that community, from that healing and growing assurance and strength
 - a) We extend that blessing, that peace and love to those around us, particularly the fearful and the lonely

N. PRAYER

⁸ Dr. Vince Berger, *Loneliness*