

Reflections on Sierra Leone Trip
Chris Wagner and Pastor George

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One of the awesome things that we discovered in Sierra Leone was the unity that is displayed in this nation recovering from war.

You see it in the stories we heard about how Christians and Muslims work side by side in villages because they are united by one simple need, survival. One of the greatest sights to see at the beginning of our trip was one of a Muslim chief who accepted Christ as His savior because of the work of the body of Christ in his village.

Another sign of unity is expressed in the forgiveness offered to the child soldiers who were used by the rebels. Young boys, as young as 8 or 10 who were ripped from their homes and faced with unspeakable horrors, were forced to kill and maim countless numbers of innocent people. But the nation has absorbed these child soldiers back into society with love, compassion and forgiveness.

Sierra Leone may be a poor nation, with most people simply living from day to day, but they are a nation that can teach us, Americans and Christians alike, the power of unity.

Come to think of it, unity was Jesus final prayer for his church. Jesus said it this way in John 17:21:

“May they all be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be one in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.”

We've spent the last month at Linglestown Life learning about what it means to be **One Church** living out **One Mission** united by **One Prayer**. (Thanks to Henry Mitchell and Ron Estep for preaching the last two weeks!) This morning I want to wrap up the series with what I believe is the outcome of Jesus One Prayer for us- a blessing for us and a blessing for the world around us.

Our text this morning comes from Psalm 133.

How good and pleasant it is
when God's people live together in unity!
It is like precious oil poured on the head,
running down on the beard,
running down on Aaron's beard,
down on the collar of his robe.
It is as if the dew of Hermon
were falling on Mount Zion.
For there the LORD bestows his blessing,
even life forevermore.

Psalm 133 is one of a series of Psalms that the Jews sang as they ascended the steps up into the temple during the three annual festival processions in Jerusalem. You can imagine the Israelites coming from north and south and east and west all converging on Jerusalem and their worship at the temple. (Sort of like Saturdays in the Fall when the faithful gather at the football shrine in Happy Valley!)

The pilgrims who made their way to the temple came from all walks of life, different regions, different tribes; but they all came together for one purpose- to worship God.

We are not much different when you think about it. On Sunday morning we come to one place to worship God. We come from different backgrounds, with different heritages, and with different needs; but when we come together we have one purpose- to worship God. We may live different lifestyles during the week, vote differently in elections, live out a variety of passions; but on Sunday mornings we have one commonality- Jesus Christ.

And it is in this diverse community that makes up our church each Sunday that God promises to bless those who learn to live together in unity.

Now the Psalmist goes on to draw two illustrations about this unity.

The first is from the oil used to anoint the priests. We don't pour oil onto people these days but in biblical times the oil poured out upon the priests was symbolic

of the power of God being poured into the life of the person who was set apart for God's use.

In the case of Aaron, and all the priests, the oil that was used was very special. It was a combination of fragrances that was uniquely formulated for the purpose of anointing the priests. (This formula was so special that God forbid anyone to use the formula for any other purpose or face the punishment of God.)

So when the Psalmist compares the unity of the people of God to oil it is as though he is referring to how when we come together it is like the common elements of this oil which when mixed together becomes something sacred.

If we follow the analogy all the way out our unity becomes like the role of the priests- to assure God's people of forgiveness and blessing. And when you think about it; when we dwell together in unity we need to have forgiveness as the hallmark of our relationships.

When we recognize that our unity is something sacred that God can use to bring hope and healing to relationships we should do the hard work required to live united at Linglestown Life.

If we are ever going to be the blessing that God wants to share with the world, then we need to strive for unity in all our relationships at Linglestown Life.

And we become a blessing to one another when we come together.

But then the Psalmist uses another analogy of unity- this time the dew of Mt Hermon. At nearly 10,000 feet above sea-level Mt Hermon is always lush with greenery even in the summer months. Quite a contrast to Mt Zion which is dry from May to October.

Unity, the Psalmist says, has the power to bring life where life did not exist before. Our unity as the body of Christ has the power to refresh like the dew of Mt Hermon.

Jesus said in his prayer that when we are united the world would stand up and take notice.

God wants to bless those who learn to live together in unity.

But God also wants to bless the world through us. And as we live together in unity at Linglestown Life not only will we see the difference in our lives, but the world will see the difference in us and be drawn to Jesus Christ.

Now as the church of Jesus Christ known as Linglestown Life; let us rise as one and together pray the prayer that unites us as one Church, united by One Mission:

Almighty God, grant that we may fulfill Jesus' prayer for unity so that we become one church. May our unity be a demonstration to the entire world that Jesus is Lord.

Almighty God, grant that as we love you with all our heart, soul, mind and strength; and love our neighbor as we love ourselves, that we may become one church. As we fulfill our mission by connecting people to you and to one another, may we see the lives of disciples strengthened and may we fulfill our call to go and make disciples of all nations.

Almighty God, grant that we may be one in prayer as we seek to be one church. May our prayer be that through the unity of your body we may proclaim Good News, that we may heal the hurts of life and that we may welcome all who seek you.

Bless, O LORD, the ministry of Linglestown Life; that all the glory may be yours both now and forever more. Amen.