

Our Past...and Our Future

Psalm 133

Today we are at a crossroads. We have to choose a direction. We've been talking about incorporation for months...and you could even say years...but today is a significant landmark event for us. Technically, we are already incorporated. We did that step a few weeks ago. But after today, should we choose to adopt the nuts and bolts of incorporation, we'll be more than a hollow shell of a corporation, but a real-live functioning corporation. I'd like to say this is something that makes me excited and energizes me, but it doesn't. Being a corporation doesn't stir the passions of most people. But, if being a corporation solidifies our standing in the culture in which we live, and adds a layer of protection for everyone here today, then you're starting to get my attention. But what really gets my attention in all this is to think about this crossroads we are standing at today, and the events that have led us up to this day.

I refreshed my memory of our history this past week as I thumbed through Ed Johnson's history of this church. I get a sense of awe as I think about settlers wandering around these same woods since the 1750's. What crossroads and decisions did those folks face? Surely, their concerns were much different than ours today. The church began in 1789 with fourteen settlers buying an acre of land for twenty shillings. Throughout the years, the church was blessed and challenged. And today, we stand in the same stream of tradition that began at least 217 years ago.

What has allowed us to serve this community for so long? Certainly the grace of God. But God has also instilled within the community an ingredient that has allowed this church to have a 217 year history. That ingredient is what the psalmist talks about in verse 1 of our text today: unity.

While we're not celebrating communion today, this psalm is often used in connection with the Lord's Supper. Augustine claimed this psalm gave birth to monasteries. The psalm is a witness that God is at work building a family that transcends all the given and instituted barriers that separate and diminish life.¹

The idea of unity in Hebrew comes through in the word יְחָד (*ya-chad*). You've heard me say before that Hebrew is a very picturesque and poetic language and יְחָד (*ya-chad*) is one of those words where simply saying it means, "unity," doesn't really do it justice. In 1 Chronicles 12:17, David says to some of his companions who have followed him out into the wilderness, "If you have come to me in friendship, to help me, then my heart will be knit to you..." A form of this same word, יְחָד (*ya-chad*), is used here. Saying things a little more

¹ James L. Mays, *Interpretation: Psalms* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1994), p. 413.

literally, David is saying his heart will become one with his followers. They will share the same heart.² If a person were somehow physically able to share the same heart with another person, then the same lifeblood keeps both people alive. Each would be necessary for the other to go on living. יָחַד (ya-chad), unity, having the same heart.

Unity in a church does not come cheaply. Baptist churches are often known more for disunity than unity. We sometimes scrap with other churches. We squabble among ourselves. Cane Creek has known both in its history.

In the 1830's, Baptist churches everywhere were wrestling with how much emphasis to place on evangelism. Does God want us to share the Gospel, witness, and use resources to evangelize or are we selling God short by devoting energy to all this. Maybe God's got it all covered in the soul-saving arena. Stephen Pleasant, a preacher in Person County, went on record in support of evangelistic efforts and his home church, Ebenezer Church, stood firmly in the Calvinist camp. Well, the church kicked Pleasant out and that's how he became our 6th pastor. Ed Johnson tells me that Cane Creek and the Person County churches were at odds some time after the Pleasant event. I find it a bit ironic that unity is not always pleasant.

In 1947, there was great debate in this congregation over the building of this very structure. Some wanted to fix up the old building. Some wanted to build a new one. Feelings got hurt. Words were said. But this congregation still stands today in this community and we are not just surviving. I'd say we often see more signs of thriving! There has continued to be a critical mass of folks in this community who have the same heart for following Christ with their lives.

Each time we gather at the Creek for a baptism, every time we rally around a family who has lost a loved one, when we greet one another in worship, when we share in conversation through the week we are being intentional about יָחַד (ya-chad), unity.

There is a rabbinical story about a Jewish man who always went to synagogue services on Friday evening. He never missed one. But he often made the point that he didn't believe in God. One Friday evening when he returned, his children asked him, "Dad, if you don't believe in God, why do you go to synagogue every Friday?" He answered, "Garfinkel is my best friend. He goes to synagogue each week to visit with God. I go to visit with Garfinkel."³

Healthy congregations know there's a connection between worship and being unified with one another. We may not always completely understand how

² Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), p. 403.

³ James Limburg, *Westminster Bible Companion: Psalms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), p. 456.

the two intertwine, but we have a hunch that we worship best when we're with one another, and just being with one another without worship is not all it can be. So the two go together. They make us well.

None of us is naïve enough to think there won't be new chapters in our history when we've wrestled with an issue. What those issues may be could be about anything. But as long as we keep unity as one of our historical and future values, we'll be alright today...and we'll be alright tomorrow.

Amen.