

**Soul Talk for the 11th Sunday after Pentecost
August 20, 2017**

August 16, 2017
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*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.
For there the LORD ordained his blessing,
life forevermore.*

Psalm 133, NRSV

Spiritual Kindred

There is a great amount of talk about unity these days.

I hear some people long for the days when communities seemed to be more unified, when their school district had not yet been merged with neighboring districts, when main street storefronts were filled with baked goods, hardware, cloth, back-to-school sales, and the town grocer knew you by name.

I hear some people long for the times when the church pews for Methodists, Catholics, Lutherans, Presbyterians, Baptists, and others were mainly full most Sundays and the ecumenical services were held on Good Friday when the schools set kids free to attend.

I hear some people long for the seasons of church life when there was not too much of a to-do to get members together for annual dinners to raise funds for missions and everybody showed up for Christmas Eve.

I hear some people lament the country is divided so deeply we cannot even look each other in the eye for fear of offending each other.

All of the conversations are about a sense, a feeling, a desire, and longing for unity – for fellowship, for togetherness, belonging, and a stick-together-at-all-costs-when-our-backs-are-against-the-wall assurance.

Philosophies, ideologies, and theologies have a way of birthing doctrines, dogmas, laws, codes, contracts, and covenants. These can be helpful in forming community, a sense of

relating to each other, a unity of some kind. And yet, they can also be left so loosely or drawn so tightly as to either neglect or strangle unity to the point of death.

What does *unity* mean to you?

How do you experience unity?

Do you foster unity or neglect it or stifle it?

Have you any substantive conversations with others about *unity* with others? If so, what have you learned in the conversation that is helpful or harmful to *unity*? If not, what are some of the reasons the conversation has not happened?

Psalm 133 expresses a *unity* based upon the relationship between *kindred* people. Even among the *kindred* the moments of *unity* are apparently fleeting. *How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity. It is precious as diamonds, as anointing oil on the head, and as dew upon the highest mountains.*

Spiritual kindred do not have to be on the same page locked into the identical ideologies, philosophies, and/or theologies; do not need to be from the same place of origin, have the same experiences in life, or color of skin, hair, eyes, or of the same age, place, station, intellect, or physical attributes.

Spiritual kindred need only the recognition of humanity in one another and all peoples.

Spiritual kindred recognize and celebrate a degree of diversity among one another as they share a question, "*How is it with your soul?*" and engage in the listening that follows.

Contrary to living as spiritual kindred is a yearning for spiritual purity; something I have come to believe needs to be avoided. Spiritual purity can too easily become an idolatry of self rather than the worship of the God who has made us to live together as spiritual kindred.

May you live in the presence of the risen Christ today.

Harlan

Soul Talk is a mostly weekly commentary written for the souls of preachers and other pilgrims and the soul of the church. I always welcome comments on Soul Talk at harlan.gillespie@iaumc.org.