

The Rev'd Misty Kiwak
 Grace Episcopal Church
 Bath, ME
 October 16, 2026
 Psalm 133

Every Episcopal liturgy contains 4 scripture texts: a reading from the Hebrew Scriptures, a Psalm, a passage from an Epistle, and one from the Gospels.

When we hear scripture read on Sundays, we enter the story of God among us. Liturgical scholar Gordon Lathrop writes, “the liturgical vision is that these stories mediate to us an utterly new thing, beyond all text... The texts are understood by the liturgy to have been transformed to speak NOW the presence of God’s grace” (*Holy Things*, 19).

There’s a podcast¹ on the Revised Common Lectionary I listen to now and then, where two scholars discuss the Sunday readings. Last week I listened to them discuss Psalm 133. **“Oh, how good and pleasant it is, when kindred live together in unity”**. The one who been a pastor joked, “Yeah, maybe in heaven”. The idea of living together in unity can seem aspirational, even in a church.

I’m also on a social media site where religion is often discussed, the good, the bad and the ugly. One young man who regularly shows up on my feed just started attending the Episcopal Church, and folks, he is IN LOVE. He is queer, and came from a fundamentalist tradition, so has some church hurt that needs healing. Now, in post after post, he writes of the bright light the Episcopal Church is for him.

In one of his posts he wrote, “I just can’t get over how wonderful the Episcopal Church has been to me. When I walk into that building, when I hear our Rector speak, when I encounter the beautiful, kind, loving folks, who gather there, it helps me feel that Christianity – or, really faith of any kind – is for anyone who wants to seek it.” Can I hear an Amen?

¹ Chapter, Verse and Season: A Lectionary Podcast from Yale Divinity School

His enthusiasm affirms my faith and my own vocation. And also, I worry a little, that he will be disillusioned. So, in my life-is-a-struggle, Eastern European-mother hen way, I felt compelled to bless him with a little dose of reality.

I wrote, "I'm so grateful you're having this experience. I hope this is the experience people have when they enter my parish. And. . . we Episcopalians are flawed and human and sometimes petty, and sometimes sensitive, and sometimes say the wrong thing. But our faith is in a God of miraculous healing and reconciliation, restoration and renewal."

My God if this sweet young man didn't answer with even more joy and love. He said, "It's refreshing to be part of a tradition that opens the doors to all for God's grace." Can I hear another Amen?

You are welcome here at Grace, in all your humanity, doubt, and flaws. And also churchpeople, including clergy, have the same weaknesses as people who don't go to church. St. Augustine wrote, "The church is a hospital, and Christ is the divine physician."

Oh, how good, how pleasant, for us to live together in unity.

How good is it?

*It is like fine oil upon the head **
that runs down upon the beard,
*Upon the beard of Aaron, **
and runs down upon the collar of his robe.

Aaron was the older brother of Miriam and Moses, and the first high priest, the chief priest, the "big pinecone" as they say in Russian, like the Archbishop of Canterbury or the Pope. Fine oil upon his head references Aaron's ordination to the priesthood. The holy oil with a holy purpose, running down his beard, a beard, according to Scholar Robert Alter, that had "proverbial amplitude", a long, sober beard.

And the oil running down Aaron's beard runs further, saturating the collar of his robe. To live together in unity is like the abundance of oil, a simple thing, a mundane thing, put to sacred use, which garners the blessings of God.

How pleasant it is for us, to live together in unity!

Like Hermon's dew that comes down

on the parched mountains

*For there the LORD ordained the blessing: **

life forevermore. (Alter translation)

Hermon is a northern mountain, the highest in Syria. Its peak is almost always covered with snow; ancient people believed the mountain provided the dew to the surrounding land during dry periods, nurturing the plants and trees. (Oxford Study Bible, notes). A small amount of oil, a small amount of dew, this is what living in unity is like. Small, good, nurturing things, signs of the blessing of God.

How pleasant to live in unity! But how do we achieve unity on this side of heaven?

The Prophet Micah tells us,

He has told you, O mortal, what is good,

and what does the LORD require of you

but to do justice and to love kindness

and to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8)

If we are merely a friendly country club full of fancy people who engage in a little charitable outreach, then we likely do not feel obliged to do the justice God requires. Neither the kindness nor humility part. We can comfortably practice a counterfeit love unknown to Christ called "politeness" with a side of "harmless" gossip.

What is gossip? Speaking uncharitably of someone who is not present. My beloved spiritual director of blessed memory, Fr. Doug Lorig, used to say gossip is a form of murder. Does that sound hyperbolic? But doesn't gossip assume the worst of someone's character, freezing them into stasis, a sort of death? Doesn't gossip presume God is on our side, when in truth God is on everyone's side, calling all into the bosom of God's mercy?

Paul addresses conflict in the Corinthian community head on: *"Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you but that you be knit together in the same mind and the same purpose."* (I Corinthians 1:10).

Paul gives us the remedy for conflict in I Corinthians chapter 13, here from the J.B. Philips translation, *"This love of which I speak is slow to lose patience—it looks for a way of being constructive. It is not possessive: it is neither anxious to impress nor does it cherish inflated ideas of its own importance."*

Love has good manners and does not pursue selfish advantage. It is not touchy. It does not keep account of evil or gloat over the wickedness of other people. On the contrary, it is glad with all good people when truth prevails.

Love knows no limit to its endurance, no end to its trust, no fading of its hope; it can outlast anything. It is, in fact, the one thing that still stands when all else has fallen" (I Cor 4:1-8a).

If we are a gathering of the followers of Christ, if we are the Church, let us open ourselves to God's transforming love. God works through invitation, not coercion. God is waiting for the invitation.

Romans 12:2, *"Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect."*

What is the mechanism of transformation? Well, the Spirit operating in us, and our cooperation with the Spirit, tilling the soil of our souls, so to speak, in prayer, especially

prayer for our enemies, for the world, silence, spiritual reading, repentance of our own failings and forgiveness of the failings of others, the offering of ourselves to God.

What is the fruit of this transformation? The fruit is God's knitting us together in community by means of God's grace, what Dietrich Bonhoeffer calls, "the roses and lilies of the Christian life" (*Life Together*, 21).

Oil, dew, roses and lilies.

*Oh, how good and pleasant it is, **
when kindred live together in unity!