

## PSALM 133 HARMONY

In this fourteenth Psalm of Ascents we come to a subject close to all our hearts-harmony. We often live in communities that are torn by strife. Those communities may be families, extended families, churches, neighbourhoods, cities and nations. Anyone who has ever found themselves in a strife torn situation knows the pain and helplessness that goes with it. No matter what we do everything seems to spiral out of control and people solve their problems by violence, verbal, physical and emotional to such an extent that everything seems destined for perdition.

How we sigh for someone to do something to restore harmony. It is this that our little psalm endorses.

The pilgrims are getting ready to leave. They have shared trust and pain. They have found renewal in the promise and presence of God. They have experienced a harmony that they do not normally experience (see 120). We began this series with the desire for peace. They have found in the promise and presence of God a harmony they did not think was possible.

### **A proverb 1**

This little proverb refers in the first instance to family. We all know that in family, especially extended family, harmony does not always prevail (Deut 25.5-10). But when it does it is good and pleasant. God is described this way (135.3) and the praise of God (147.1). In other words when we do find harmony it is like being in the presence of God and like praise that brings us into the presence. It is a deeply moving God experience

## **A simile: oil 2**

So when the community lives together in harmony is the granting of a blessing and a rare gift. That rare gift bears comparison with the generous, even lavish, oil that is used in the chief priest's anointing (cf. Ex 29.7). The olive oil is the oil of healing, of restoring the skin and hair ravaged by heat and wind and age (2 Sam 12.20), and signifies the setting apart of king (1 Sam 10.1), priest (Lev 8.30), and prophet (Is 61.1).

The oil, flowing down in such generous proportion, is a sign of hospitality, joy and relatedness (Ps 23.5; 92.10; 141.5). Such hospitality and joy and being-in-relation are made holy in Aaron's anointing. The high priest is the bearer and symbol of God's hospitality to his people and the joy that brings.

So such harmony is a holy thing.

## **Another simile: dew 3**

When the community lives together in harmony it is like the blessing of moisture that falls on Hermon some 200kms from Jerusalem. It is as though the dew from Hermon covers the city in refreshing life that lays the dust and gives clear air.

The focus shifts here to the unity of the nation found in the worship centred in Zion. It is the worship in Zion that is like the dew and the blessing is the renewing and refreshing presence of the Lord. Here they find harmony in the Presence which is the true source of their life. The life that the Lord gives his people in their unity is the supreme family value. It is the greatest good. The presence of the God of steadfast love, truthfulness, righteousness justice, and mercy defines what makes human relationships, including family and the

church, healthy and vibrant. It is the presence that makes them transforms them and gives them life.

It is this life that God ordains for all, a life that like God's is for evermore. Life forevermore is a life in harmony with this sovereign God. This is God's blessing.

### **Further reflections**

This little Psalm begins with a perennial concern for ancient Israel and us; family values. They and we know the significance of family for society. It is the place where we learn and experience intimacy, love and growth or their counterparts, resentment, abuse and destructive behaviour.

Clearly v.1 emphasises that first role of the family. But vv. 2-3 go beyond it and put it in a larger context of God's relationship with his people. What that does is to make the family a significant and necessary part of God's purposes but it is in no way the defining institution of that purpose.

Jesus said much the same thing (Mk 3.35-36). The family must be defined by something bigger than itself; the larger family of God's people living under the sovereignty of God.

“The family is society in miniature, the place where we first and most deeply learn how to love and be loved, hate and be hated, help and be helped, abuse and be abused. It is not just a center of domestic serenity; since it involves power, it invites the abuse of power, and it is at that precise point that Jesus attacks it. His ideal is, contrary to Mediterranean and indeed most human familial reality, an open and equally accessible to all under God. It is the kingdom of God, and it negates that terrible abuse of power that is power's dark specter and lethal

shadow.” John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: a revolutionary biography*, San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1994, p.60

It is the larger vision of the kingdom that informs the family and not the reverse. All institutions are subject to the judgment of the kingdom and its values. The family is as much subject to the values of the Sermon on the Mount as is society or the church. This wider view will save the family from itself.

We need to subject our church life to the same set of values. By church life I mean, our communal life, our life of lived relationships and I do not mean just what we do. Do we live together as the kingdom demands; in justice, in putting things to rights, in truthfulness, in humility, in mercy, forgoing the aphrodisiac of power for the good of the whole? Are our relationships of such a quality that they proclaim the justice and righteousness of the kingdom? We cannot expect anyone to listen to us if our relationships reflect secular values of power and authority.

The best description of harmony and therefore exposition of Psalm 133 in the NT is Phil 2.1-11. It is the life giving relationship with the risen Christ that we find an identity that prevents us making an idol of human familial or church reality. Harmony is a process of finding our true identity in the Risen Christ in relation to others.

### **Question**

Read the quote from John Dominic Crossan above. What do you think of his analysis? How can power and harmony work in unity?