



**SCRIPTURE READING: Psalm 133**

When I was a very young preacher, I had the opportunity to preach at Tabb Street Presbyterian Church in Petersburg, VA. “Tabb,” as it was simply called, had been one of the great churches of the South but the time I preached there had dwindled down to a handful of people. There were a lot of reasons for that—infighting among the people, unwillingness to change to reach the overwhelmingly black neighborhood in which it found itself, and holding on to the glory of past years, which blinded them to their present. As it turned out, the Scripture reading for that day—read from the pulpit Bible that went back to R. L. Dabney’s pastorate in 1864-65—was from Psalm 133! It was a little ironic, to say the least.

And yet, it was a song they needed to hear. For Psalm 133 tells us that unity in the church is one of the greatest goods that God can give: “Behold! Look! How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity” (133:1). Such unity produces genuine community that is soothing and refreshing to our souls. The two images, precious oil and refreshing dew—picture for us the way genuine friendship soothes us and refreshes us. We need this grace from the Triune God to sustain us in this life.

**HYMN: “MAY THE GRACE OF CHRIST OUR SAVIOR” Choral Response by James Brown, arr. K. Lee Scott**

May the grace of Christ our Savior,  
and the love of God the Father,  
and the fellowship of the Spirit be with us.

May the grace of Christ our Savior,  
and the love of God the Father,  
and the fellowship of the Spirit be with us  
forever, forever, forevermore. Amen

**PRAYER:** (from *Psalms for All Seasons*, p. 730)

Almighty God, Father, Son, Spirit, you give such good gifts to the sons of men. Yet the greatest gift you give us is genuine friendship and community with each other, which itself springs out of the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace. In these times of separation, help us to cherish to an even greater degree this unity in which we as your people dwell. May we see how this is your blessing both for now and always that belongs to us as your people. And may we live and die in the comfort of belonging to you, Triune God, and of the communion of the saints, for we pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.

**CATECHISM: Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 2**

What must you know to live and die in the joy of this comfort [that I belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ]?

Three things: first, how great my sin and misery are; second, how I am set free from all my sins and misery; third, how I am to thank God for such deliverance.



**SCRIPTURE READING: 1 John 4:7-21**

It is notable that throughout this letter, John calls his people, “Beloved.” Six times, he uses that title for them, twice in this section. I think he wants them to know not only are they loved by John, but they are loved by God himself—they are God’s beloved. Of course, the character of God’s love is rooted in his own being—twice, John tells us that “God is love” (4:8, 16). But you know the nature of God’s love best from his acting—when he sent Jesus his Son to be the atoning sacrifice, the “propitiation,” for our sins.

Such love changes everything for us. One of the consequences of God’s love is that we in turn love one another: “Beloved, if [or since] God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (4:11). Also, we find that God’s love enables us to abide in him, to rest and remain in him. And finally, we do not fear the judgment day because God’s love drives the fear of that day out of our hearts. As those who are God’s beloved, we bask in that love and learn as a result to love another. Thanks be to God!

**HYMN: “MORE LOVE TO THEE, O CHRIST” Twit (also *Trinity Hymnal* 649)**

More love to thee, O Christ, more love to thee!  
Hear thou the prayer I make on bended knee;  
this is my earnest plea, more love, O Christ, to thee,  
more love to thee, more love to thee!

Once earthly joy I craved, sought peace and rest;  
now thee alone I seek; give what is best:  
this all my prayer shall be, more love, O Christ, to thee,  
more love to thee, more love to thee!

Let sorrow do its work, send grief and pain;  
sweet are thy messengers, sweet their refrain,  
when they can sing with me, more love, O Christ, to thee,  
more love to thee, more love to thee!

Then shall my latest breath whisper thy praise;  
this be the parting cry my heart shall raise,  
this still its prayer shall be, more love, O Christ, to thee,  
more love to thee, more love to thee!

**PRAYER:** (adapted from “My Jesus, I Love Thee,” *Trinity Hymnal* 648)

My Jesus, I love you, I know you are mine. For you, all the follies of sin I resign. I love you because you have first loved me and purchased my pardon on Calvary’s tree. I’ll love you in life and I will love you in death; and praise you as long as you lend me your breath. I’ll say when the death-dew lies cold on my brow, if ever I love you, my Jesus, ‘tis now. Grant that I would grow and abound in this love for you so that I might love others freely in your name, Amen.

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### SCRIPTURE READING: Genesis 45

One would be hard pressed to find another passage of Scripture that teaches us more about providence than this one. After Joseph reveals himself to his brothers, he freely tells them that they sold him into slavery—twice in verses four and five, he tells them “you sold me here.” Yet, who sent Joseph into Egypt? Three times he says, God did: “God sent me before you to preserve life”; “God sent me before you to preserve for you a remnant on earth”; “It was not you who sent me here, but God” (45:5, 7, 8).

But this is also a chapter that teaches us about mercy. Truth be told, now that Joseph had all the power, he should have applied justice to these men. In fact, even after their father Jacob died, the brothers feared that Joseph would show them justice and deal with them (Gen. 50:16-18). Yet he doesn’t do that—rather, he shows them overwhelming mercy. He hugs and kisses them; he provides for them in wasteful fashion; and he even directs them on how to live differently in the light of mercy (“Do not quarrel on the way” [45:24]).

Isn’t this how God treats us? Even when we don’t fully understand it, we discover his mercy is more.

### HYMN: “HIS MERCY IS MORE” Papa & Boswell

What love could remember no wrongs we have done?  
 Omniscient, all knowing, he counts not their sum!  
 Thrown into a sea without bottom or shore,  
 our sins they are many, his mercy is more.  
 Praise the Lord, his mercy is more.  
 Stronger than darkness, new every morn,  
 our sins they are many, his mercy is more.

What patience would wait as we constantly roam?  
 What Father, so tender, is calling us home?  
 He welcomes the weakest, the vilest, the poor,  
 our sins they are many, his mercy is more.  
 Praise the Lord, his mercy is more.  
 Stronger than darkness, new every morn,  
 our sins they are many, his mercy is more.

What riches of kindness he lavished on us!  
 His blood was the payment, his life was the cost.  
 We stood ‘neath a debt we could never afford,  
 our sins they are many, his mercy is more.  
 Praise the Lord, his mercy is more.  
 Stronger than darkness, new every morn,  
 our sins they are many, his mercy is more.

### PRAYER: (adapted from Matthew Henry, *A Way to Pray*, p. 68)

Take away all our iniquity, and receive us graciously, O Lord. Heal our apostasy, and love us freely. Turn your anger away from us. Though our sins be red as scarlet, let them be as pure as snow. Though they be a brilliant red, let them be as wool. As we show ourselves willing and submissive rather than rebellious and resistant, allow us to eat the good of the land. Bless you for pouring out your just wrath upon Jesus that we might receive mercy from you when we rest ourselves in him. Amen.

### CATECHISM: Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 2

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**SCRIPTURE READING: Matthew 18:21-35**

We often call this “the parable of the unforgiving servant.” The story starts with Jesus articulating a principle over against Peter’s presumed prodigality of forgiveness: “I do not say to you [to forgive] seven times, but seventy times seven” (18:22). The point, of course, is not to forgive only seventy-seven times or 490 times—rather, it is to forgive in a limitless fashion.

But why? And how is that possible anyway? That’s what the parable, the picture, is meant to show. It tells the story of a compassionate king who forgives the astronomical debt of a manager—far beyond the man’s ability to repay. Yet, after knowing this kind of overwhelming generosity and forgiveness, the servant goes his way and fails to forgive the much smaller (yet significant) debt of his fellow servant. The king is furious and in the key line declares, “Should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?” (18:33).

That’s why we should forgive over and over again—we have been shown overwhelming, full and free mercy by God the King through Jesus Christ. We should then show unlimited mercy to one another and forgive in a limitless fashion.

**HYMN: “FORGIVE OUR SINS AS WE FORGIVE” *Trinity Hymnal* 494 (Tune: Ortonville)**

“Forgive our sins as we forgive,” you taught us, Lord, to pray;  
but you alone can give us grace to live the words we say, to live the words we say.

How can your pardon reach and bless the unforgiving heart  
that broods on wrongs and will not let old bitterness depart, old bitterness depart?

In blazing light your cross reveals the truth we dimly know;  
how small the debts men owe to us; how great our debt to you, how great our debt to you.

Lord, cleanse the depths within our souls, and bid resentment cease;  
then, reconciled to God and man our lives will spread your peace, our lives will spread your peace.

**PRAYER:**

O Lord, I confess that there are many things that I am holding in my heart against someone else. They have hurt me in significant ways—and I don’t want to forgive them. Help me hear their request for forgiveness as my voice asking you for forgiveness; move my heart with your own compassion for me; and let me say, “I forgive you,” as freely and wastefully as you have said the same to me through Jesus Christ, in whose name I pray, Amen.

**CATECHISM: Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 2**

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**SCRIPTURE READING: John 17:20-26**

It is striking that at the end of Jesus' High Priestly Prayer he moves to pray for future generations that will come to believe through the witness of the apostles. What does Jesus pray for when he thinks about you and me and the many who have put their faith in him? He prays for three things: first, unity. He not only prays "that they may all be one" (17:21), but also "that they may become perfectly one" (17:23). This unity is founded on a common faith in Jesus—after all, he prays for "those who will believe in me" (17:20)—and a common commitment to the apostolic witness—"those who will believe in me *through their word*" (17:20). This produces a common union with each other: Christ in us and we together are in Christ (17:21, 23).

He also prays for glory—that the glory that is his would be shared with us (17:22). He desires us to know that glory *now*, as we put our trust in him, but especially *then*, when we come to see him as he is. Finally, he prays for certainty—that we might know confidently that the Father has sent the Son and the Son reveals the Father to all those who trust in him (17:25-26). Consider such love that would cause Jesus to pray these things for us!

**HYMN: "MAY THE MIND OF CHRIST MY SAVIOR" *Trinity Hymnal 644***

May the mind of Christ my Savior live in me from day to day,  
by his love and pow'r controlling all I do and say.

May the Word of God dwell richly in my heart from hour to hour,  
so that all may see I triumph only through his pow'r.

May the peace of God my Father rule my life in everything,  
that I may be calm to comfort sick and sorrowing.

May the love of Jesus fill me as the waters fill the sea;  
him exalting, self abasing, this is victory.

May his beauty rest upon me as I seek the lost to win,  
and may they forget the channel, seeing only him.

**PRAYER:**

We praise you, Lord Jesus, that you were praying for us long before we were ever born. Thank you for praying for our unity, glory, and certainty as your followers. Grant that we might continue to grow in these areas, especially when we have the opportunity to come back together once again and resume our life together as a congregation. Help us too to see the various ways you are at work among brothers and sisters in other congregations, other denominations, and other places around your world. And above all, may we live for the praise of your glory, in Jesus' name, Amen.

**CATECHISM: Heidelberg Catechism, Q&A 2**

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**SCRIPTURE READING: Ephesians 4:1-6**

Sometimes we wonder what exactly the Christian life looks like. Paul answers that question in these verses—you see that it begins with him urging us “to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called.” He desires us to live like Christians—but how? Here he tells us that we do so by maintaining unity in the common life of the church. There are four attitudes that are necessary for living in unity with other believers: humility, gentleness, patience, and forbearance. As the Holy Spirit works those attitudes into us, we find it easier to live in unity with those who can frustrate, offend, challenge, or exasperate us.

We are committed to those attitudes or virtues because of the basic Christian affirmations that we make. There are seven affirmations in verses 4-6: there is one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God and Father. These affirmations remind us that our unity with each other as believers is not only nurtured by love; rather, shared truth must serve as the basis of unity. As Christians, we have a great deal of truth in common—that enables us to demonstrate humility, gentleness, patience, and forbearance. As God’s people, we are family.

**HYMN: “WE ARE GOD’S PEOPLE” *Trinity Hymnal 355***

We are God’s people, the chosen of the Lord,  
born of his Spirit, established by his Word;  
our cornerstone is Christ alone, and strong in him we stand:  
O let us live transparently, and walk heart to heart and hand in hand.

We are God’s loved ones, the Bride of Christ our Lord,  
for we have known it, the love of God outpoured;  
now let us learn how to return the gift of love once giv’n:  
O let us share each joy and care, and live with a zeal that pleases heav’n.

We are the Body of which the Lord is Head,  
called to obey him, now risen from the dead;  
he wills us be a family, diverse yet truly one:  
O let us give our gifts to God, and so shall his work on earth be done.

We are a temple, the Spirit’s dwelling place,  
formed in great weakness, a cup to hold God’s grace;  
we die alone, for on its own each member loses fire:  
yet joined in one the flame burns on to give warmth and light, and to inspire.

**PRAYER:**

O Lord, we bless you for your Church. We bless you that you put us in the midst of your body, in the midst of this family; that you have given us a shared set of truths to affirm; and that you work in us the very virtues necessary for us to live together. Help us to value the truth of God given to us in Holy Scripture. Help us to grow in our humility, patience, gentleness, and forbearance as we deal with each other. And above all, may we grow into the fullness of the measure of the stature of Christ for his glory, Amen.

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**SCRIPTURE READING: Revelation 1:1-8**

Undoubtedly over the past weeks you have seen many folks on the internet or on TV who have tried to connect this global pandemic to the Book of Revelation. And I do think it is connected—in the sense that violence, famine, plague, and war characterize what life is like in this world between the first and second coming of Jesus. But this book is more than simply a diagnostic about the present and the future; the first words tell us that it represents “the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

That phrase tells us two things. It tells us that this book reveals Jesus to us. He is the Alpha and Omega; he is the Lion of Judah and the Lamb slain; he is the child born to Mary and the warrior who is Faithful and True. But that phrase, the revelation of Jesus Christ, also tells us that this book is from Jesus to us. And he wants us to know—to know him, what he is doing now, what he will do in the future. He is the one who holds the scroll of human history in his hand and he wants us to know that, whatever happens, he is in control. And there is a direction to this whole story, which will resolve at the new heavens and new earth.

**HYMN: “CHRIST IS MADE THE SURE FOUNDATION” *Trinity Hymnal* 342**

Christ is made the sure foundation, Christ the head and cornerstone,  
chosen of the Lord and precious, binding all the church in one;  
holy Zion’s help forever, and her confidence alone.

All that dedicated city, dearly loved of God on high,  
in exultant jubilation pours perpetual melody;  
God the One in Three adoring in glad hymns eternally.

To this temple, where we call thee, come, O Lord of hosts, today:  
with thy wonted loving-kindness hear thy people as they pray;  
and thy fullest benediction shed within its walls away.

Here vouchsafe to all thy servants what they ask of thee to gain,  
what they gain from thee forever with the blessed to retain,  
and hereafter in thy glory evermore with thee to reign.

Laud and honor to the Father, laud and honor to the Son,  
laud and honor to the Spirit, ever Three and ever One,  
One in might, and One in glory while unending ages run.

**PRAYER:** (adapted from F. B. Meyer’s *Daily Prayers*)

We draw near to you, all-powerful and ever-living God in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, our high priest and mediator who has passed into the heavens, where he lives to make intercession for sinners. May we come to know Jesus better through his Word and his most holy providence in our lives. May we see him as high and holy as well as meek and lowly, as the Lion of Judah and the Lamb of God slain, as the keeper of the keys and the holder of our lives. Forgive and accept us for his sake and for your glory, for we pray in Jesus’ name, Amen.

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