



## Sermon Transcript October 24, 2021

### Missions Sunday The Blessing of Unity! Psalm 133

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on October 24, 2021 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Rev. Andre Riendeau. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio and video version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at [www.wethefc.com](http://www.wethefc.com)

**Sermon Text**  
**Psalm 133**

A Song of Ascents. Of David.

1 Behold, how good and pleasant it is  
when brothers dwell in unity!

2 It is like the precious oil on the head,  
running down on the beard,  
on the beard of Aaron,  
running down on the collar of his robes!

3 It is like the dew of Hermon,  
which falls on the mountains of Zion!  
For there the Lord has commanded the blessing, life forevermore.

## Introduction

Greetings from the brothers and sisters of Wintonbury! What a joy to be with you all today...in spite of your location! I grew up in Rocky Hill and Wethersfield was our biggest rival! It's a little like a Red Sox fan hanging out in Yankees country, but I'll give you a pass this one time! Actually, I still have my Rocky Hill Little League uniform from almost 50 years ago! Wow! I played for St. James Church. That's the church I grew up going to. I learned about God there, but I didn't know Him personally. That didn't happen until I was a freshman in college at the University of New Hampshire.

Four years after my mother came to faith through a Pentecostal church, I accepted Christ through a Christian campus group. The morning after I gave my life to Christ, I called my mom thinking she'd be thrilled. I said, "Mom, guess what, I became a Christian last night. I'm born again!" She responded by saying, "That's great, are you speaking in tongues?" I had no idea what she was talking about. I said, "Ah...I'm not sure, I don't think so." She then said, "Well, you're not a Christian yet but you're on the right track." I was shocked!

Immediately, I called the man who had led me to Christ and told him that my mom said I wasn't a Christian yet. He asked why and I said it was because I didn't speak in tongues. He said, "Oh, don't worry about that." I asked why not. He replied, "Because it doesn't exist anymore." "What?! Then what is my mother doing?" He said, "Well, honestly, either she's faking it, or the Bible says that Satan can disguise himself as an angel of light." I remember hanging up the phone and being dumbfounded! Here I was, half a day old, 12 hours, in Christ, yet I knew enough to know that my mom knew Jesus and this man knew Jesus. Yet she didn't think he knew Jesus and he thought she was an imposter and/or demoniac! I knew in that moment, even as a literal baby Christian, that I wanted to be part of fixing that. I wanted to be part of seeing God's people unified. I share all this because at the heart of THP is a passion for the unity of God's people. Why? Psalm 133 answers that; but before we get there, let me explain what THP is and does.

Here is a **(LCD) screenshot** of our website. I'd encourage you to go there to find out more about the Hartford Project. As I hope you can see, our mission is to spark transformation by uniting the Church to glorify God and bless our city through acts of kindness and love. Our Vision is to see Hartford restored to being a city on a hill for the glory of God and joy of all people. Our goals are to see the body of Christ in and around the city being built up and serving in Hartford, to promote unity in the body of

Christ, and to pray for the work of God in Hartford. Youth from urban and suburban, Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal, black, white, brown and others comes together and live, worship and serve in the city with each other for five days and all through the year. God does a great work in and through all of us working and living in Jesus.

Now I'd like to focus especially on our (LCD) vision statement. **Our Vision is to see Hartford restored to being a city on a hill for the glory of God and joy of all people.**

The central concept is that of a "city on a hill." If you're my age or older, you might remember Ronald Reagan using this image as a symbol of America's calling to be a beacon of freedom to the world. The image, however, really comes from two places. First, Jesus Himself in His Sermon on the Mount, (LCD) **"You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead, they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."** A city on a hill cannot be hidden. The followers of Jesus are to be seen and heard, in particular, their good deeds. This is what THP tries to do, make Jesus famous, by showing the world the glory of His love and goodness. When we do this, we are shining the beacon of freedom in Christ to the world.

Secondly, this image was used by a guy named (LCD) **John Winthrop** who was among the Puritans who escaped religious persecution in England by coming to the shores of America 400 years ago. In a sermon entitled, "A Model of Christian Charity," Winthrop said this, **"For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world."** Winthrop was exhorting the people to live as one, to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. His vision was that this colony of believers, in spite of their differences, would live together peaceably and sacrificially as a celebration of the power of the gospel to reconcile and unite. He said if they succeeded, they'd be an example, a city upon a hill, for all the world to see. If they failed, they'd invite ridicule and shame.

Unfortunately, unity proved hard to achieve even then! Just six years after Winthrop preached that sermon, in 1636, another well-known preacher of that time, Thomas

Hooker, found himself at odds with his fellow-clergymen in Boston. The issue was church membership. On what grounds should someone be accepted as a member? Some thought it should be stringent, only the most holy be admitted; others took a more gracious line and thought it should be open to anyone who professed faith in Christ. Hooker was among the gracious. Sensing the legalism and rigidity that would eventually lead to the Salem Witch Trials, **(LCD) Hooker took a group of 100 followers** and trekked to a place that his associate Samuel Stone had scouted out the year before – land along the big river – what we now know as the Windsor/Hartford cove.

It was here, in 1636, that Hooker and his band determined to try the experiment again: to establish a city upon a hill that would serve as a beacon of gospel unity and freedom to the entire world. They built a church about where the Old State House stands today and named the town Newtown. A year later, they renamed the town Hartford after Stone's birthplace: Hertford, England. I haven't found out why, but I did find something interesting. The etymology means "the fords where harts cross" or "deer crossing." And I'm guessing that they chose that name because of Psalm 42, **(LCD) "As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?"** I can't prove it, but I suspect that these passionate Jesus lovers chose a name that reflected their vision: to be a city where people who are thirsty and hungry for God could find Him!

And the key to this, back to Winthrop's original sermon, is unity. Look at what Winthrop preached right before the "city upon a hill" passage I read earlier, listen carefully, *"Now the only way to avoid this shipwreck, and to provide for our posterity, is to follow the counsel of Micah, to do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God. For this end, we must be knit together, in this work, as one man. We must entertain each other in brotherly affection. We must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities, for the supply of others' necessities. We must uphold a familiar commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience and liberality. We must delight in each other; make others' conditions our own; rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, as members of the same body. So shall we keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace."* Wow.

Winthrop was saying that if Hartford is to be a city upon a hill, to let our light shine before all men, unity is the key. Someone who would agree with that is King David. Open your Bibles to Psalm 133. This is one of the psalms of ascent that the people of Israel would sing as they came up to the temple three times per year. Pilgrims from all over Israel ascended the hill together singing, *"How good and pleasant it is when God's*

*people live together in unity! It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down on the collar of his robe. It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion. For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore."*

First of all, David says that unity is good and pleasant. The word for good means 'perfect, fulfilling' and the word for pleasant means 'delightful, lovely, enjoyable.' In other words, unity is a perfect experience. David then illustrates the goodness and pleasantness of living together in unity by two metaphors in verses two and three. The first image, anointing oil, pictures how good it is, and the second, dew, how pleasant it is. The first metaphor is in verse two, "*It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down on the collar of his robe.*" David says that living together in unity is good because it is like the anointing oil that was poured upon Aaron's head – what?! Sounds messy to me! In the Hebrew, the same word used for 'good' in verse one is translated here as 'precious' in verse two – it's the same word – Good oil is like good unity. But why is it good? How is it good?

Remember that when the Israelites came out of Egypt, they met with God in a tent in the desert. God was going to live with them...but how? He's holy and they're not! So God gave them a gift – the priesthood. The ability for a sinful human being like Aaron, to come into God's presence to be with Him. To enable this, the Lord instructed Moses to create a sacred anointing oil by mixing several spices and oils that was to be used only for this purpose. When it was poured on Aaron's head, it changed him from an ordinary Israelite to one who could mediate between God and humanity. So why is unity good? Because it enables us to be ambassadors of reconciliation between heaven and earth.

The second metaphor in verse three shows us how pleasant unity is, "*It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion.*" How in the world is unity like dew and why is dew pleasant? First of all, take a look at **(LCD) Mount Hermon**. Mount Hermon is the highest mountain in the Middle East, over 9000 feet tall, four times higher than Mount Zion and Jerusalem. It is HIGH! So high that it is snow-covered year round and when the snow melts, it provides most of the water that flows into the Jordan River. Mount Hermon means life to Israel because the hills of Jerusalem were located **(LCD) in the dryer, southern region of Palestine** which receives very little rain. So Mount Hermon means life to Israel!

David says where you have unity, you have the power of life flowing. And when this happens, we can experience the staggering promise in the last part of verse three, "*For*

*there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.*” God commands His blessing THERE - wherever there is unity. It is in unity, wherever and whenever that takes place, that God bestows or rather, commands, His blessing. That’s powerful friends, really, really powerful. It is the key to revival in our cities, our churches and our homes. This is what Jesus prayed for, that we’d be ONE. Black, white, Latino, Pentecostal, evangelical, rich, poor – ONE! This is where the Lord commands His blessing! Unity!

Winthrop had it right theologically, but the Puritans failed to live it out. Hooker had it right but look at Hartford today: **(LCD) according to the U.S. Census Bureau**, Hartford is the fourth poorest city in America in spite of being the capital of the richest state per capita! Spiritually, look at **(LCD) this 2019 Barna Report** of the most Post-Christian cities in America: Hartford is seventh! This is not good and pleasant! And the blame should not fall on Democrats or Republicans, Conservatives or Liberals. Scripture says that judgment starts with the house of God. I believe that had our ancestors walked in the Spirit of unity as ambassadors of reconciliation, all would be well today. Let me read Winthrop’s words again, **(LCD) “We must delight in each other; make others’ conditions our own; rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, as members of the same body.”** Unity is the place where God pours out His blessing.

But unity is elusive. The only way we can live it out is through submission to the Holy Spirit of God, it is the unity of the Spirit. It is the Spirit that brings life, even from the beginning. Genesis 1, **(LCD) “Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.”** The Spirit then comes upon creation and life pours forth! The Triune God, working in unity through the Spirit, brings forth life! This holds true in the New Testament too. Luke 1, the angel says to Mary, **(LCD) “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.”** The Spirit comes upon a little girl to bring forth Jesus who is life in the flesh. Notice these three key words: Holy Spirit, come on you, and power. Luke wrote another book, Acts, and he begins that book this way, Acts 1:8, **(LCD) “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”** Luke tells us that the Spirit comes upon the believers and brings forth the Church which is the source of life and blessing in the world. I don’t think it’s a coincidence that Luke repeats these three words. The first chapter of a book reveals where an author is going. Genesis 1 tells us that God the Author of Life is

bringing it forth through His Spirit. Luke tells us that God is bringing forth life through Jesus and He is seen and experienced through the Spirit-led church.

Listen my friends, the church is God's means of blessing the world. I believe we need to do two things if we're to fulfill this calling: pursue unity even at our local church's expense and realize who we really are. At Wintonbury, we've developed a saying, **(LCD) "Kingdom first; Wintonbury second."** If another church has a need that we can fill, we need to put their needs first. This doesn't lead to great church growth, but it does lead to kingdom growth. I urge Wethersfield E Free to prioritize kingdom building and one way to do that is partnering with us at THP.

Second, we need to realize who we are as THE body of Christ in the world. Let me close with this. Did any of you ever see the movie "Lincoln" directed by Steven Spielberg? It's amazing. It focuses on Lincoln's efforts in to abolish slavery by passing the Thirteenth Amendment. There is a scene where **(LCD) Lincoln is with his key advisors** the night before the vote assessing where they stand. They tell him that him that they don't have the votes. They're two votes short. Lincoln goes back and forth with them trying to figure out how to get the two votes when finally, one of them insists that it's just not possible and too late. At that point, **(LCD) Lincoln rises from his seat**, points at his men, and says, "I am the President of the United States of America clothed in IMMENSE power! You will procure me these votes!" To which the men go out and get the votes. And with that, the promise of freedom flows to the many.

Friends, we need to remember who we are. Here's another saying we have at Wintonbury, **(LCD) "I am an ambassador of the kingdom of God clothed in IMMENSE power!"** Say it with me, "I am an ambassador of the kingdom of God clothed in IMMENSE power!" That's who you are individually, and it's who we are corporately. We are clothed in Holy Spirit power to declare His praises. We are to be a city upon a hill proclaiming life to all who come to Jesus. Friends, join with us at THP and let's be a beacon of gospel freedom in the city which pants for the Living God!





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