



## Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

God's work. Our hands.

August 15, 2014

***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***

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

This Sunday, the tenth Sunday after Pentecost, Lutherans will gather in worship and share in the reading of Psalm 133, a Psalm that reminds us of the goodness and blessing of a life lived in unity with one another.

Generally an encouraging Psalm, at a time such as this, when the world seems anything but unified, these words may feel more jarring than inspiring. This is especially so now as news from Iraq continues to worsen. Approximately 150,000 people recently fled their homes in the wake of attacks from Islamic State militants and their allies. While reports indicate that the immediate threat to many of these precious lives was abated by the delivery of food and water aid, an estimated 300 people, many of them children, still perished from exposure, dehydration and starvation. Reports of attacks, atrocities and human-rights abuses, often targeted at religious minorities and other vulnerable groups, cause our hearts to cry out in lamentation rather than in the hope that this week's Psalm celebrates.

The continued violence in parts of Iraq has put at grave risk the already tenuous security situation of the entire country and diminishes the ability of Iraq's new government to lead with a strong vision of national solidarity and peace. Our hearts are heavy with sorrow and concern as we further mourn the violence that has come to typify the news we hear from Iraq. Many of us served or have family or friends who served as US military or security personnel in Iraq or are Iraqis ourselves and are now a part of US communities. The proximity of Iraq in our experience as American Christians heightens our awareness of the continued suffering and increases the depth of our distress and grief.

And yet in the midst of this sorrow and what seems like an endless stream of bad news, the Holy Spirit leads us to ponder these words of the Psalmist: *How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!* Perhaps rather than a reminder of what seems unattained in this moment, these words, given to us as manna for the soul, stand as invitation. Perhaps in the midst of a hopeless world, this Psalm summons us to an understanding that any vision other than unity with our kindred – that is, the world -- is idolatrous. Perhaps this Psalm, in this week when the world seems splintered and on the brink of rupture, speaks to us with special encouragement and whispers an enduring word of hope.

Our hearts may cry out in mourning, but God fills us with a desire to follow the words of the Psalmist as we pray for peace and unity. Indeed, how very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity! In a world that says otherwise, may we hear the words of this Psalm and believe.

In the Hope that is Our Risen Savior,

The Rev. Elizabeth A. Eaton  
Presiding Bishop