

Harmony

A Ladies Lunch devotional by Sue Holbrook, First Methodist Church



Purnell Kennedy (in the blue shirt) and his brother Tom in the grove

I'm continuing with thoughts from psalms...verses that catch my eye and feed my understanding. We've had Psalm 119:71 it was good for me to be afflicted; psalms 121 and 123 I lift up my eyes; and today I'm looking at Psalm 133...How wonderful and pleasant it is when brothers live together in harmony.

When it comes to what can be learned about brotherly harmony, I could offer no better example than my father and his brother. Tom and Purnell Kennedy. My dad is Purnell, the one in the blue shirt. They lost their father when Uncle Tom was 14 and Daddy was 9. Tom quit school and went to work to support the family, which was the two brothers, three sisters and a mother who had severe asthma and was always in fragile health. It was 1929, a very dark time in our country's economy. They inherited their father's fifteen acres of grapefruit grove, not exactly a sought after product when keeping staples on the table was a challenge. However, they worked that grove together, they caught fish in the river to feed their family and with the help of their grandfather and uncle they managed to survive the war years. In the late 1940s as young men they branded themselves as Kennedy Groves.

So now let's talk about harmony. Tom was the surrogate father and ultimate man of the earth. He could grow anything and kept the groves going. Purnell was the born

entrepreneur. He was the lead dog of our roadside fruit stand and he had an inborn sense about how to sell whatever he had. For example, one year there was an overabundance of very small grapefruit. Purnell bagged them up, put a sign on them that they were Honey Balls and they sold like hotcakes. In fact, they became a staple of our front end sales. So it all sounds like sweet music in the trees, doesn't it? The usual image of harmony.

Listen...there is harmony and there is harmony. Harmony doesn't always sound like beautiful music with melodious chords. A beautiful symphony can have some discords and still be agreeable. Harmony can handle discord. Harmony is disagreeing in love, even if voices get raised in irritation. There is the underlying acceptance that we will come together on this issue, find common ground and decide a way forward. Uncle Tom lived across the street from us. He and daddy would get on the phone to discuss some business issue and in a few minutes - as Mom often said - they didn't need the phones. They could just yell across the street. The thing that made it work was their underlying motive...reaching a peaceful agreement for the good of the family and the business. And they achieved that. Tomorrow was always another day. The key is - they never cut each other off. The voices always calmed down and the conversation continued. It was the attitude that was important. I'm sure some folks won't agree with my perception but to me it was a great example of agreeing to disagree. Their bond was strong and remained unbroken until they died.

The psalm speaks of brothers living in harmony and that harmony is precious and refreshing. If we're going to truly live in harmony we have to look to the wider world as well. It's not unchristian to be angry...it's how we handle that anger that matters. In Ephesians, Paul tells us not to sin in our anger. How do we interact with our extended families, our friends, our Christian sisters and brothers? The truth is that disharmony is often just lurking around the corner. It can cut a relationship in half in a split second. I saw it in the days of our disaffiliation journey. I have felt it in political discussions. I've experienced it in family doings. I believe in this country we have lost the ability to have civil back and forth conversation. There is an attitude afloat that if you don't think the way I do I can't have anything to do with you. Sisters...if we only talk and listen to people who think like we do, we're living in an echo chamber. We lose sight of the fact that somebody else just might have a worthy thought that we might be blessed to hear.

God has given us a beautiful world to live in, and some great people to share it with. We don't honor that world if we are in constant battle with the people around us. Harmony in the world is precious and refreshing. After all, God loves us so much that he gave us...ALL of us... the best gift we could ever receive. I think we can do no less than let the peace of Christ rule in our hearts...and whatever we do, in word or deed, do it all for the glory of God.

It's a beautiful earth. Stand and let's sing...For the Beauty of the Earth

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