

Lectionary Texts for April 7, 2024 • *Second Sunday in Easter* - Year B
Acts 4:32-35 • Psalm 133 • 1 John 1:1-2:2 • John 20:19-31



Psalm 133

Cottage, 1885, by Vincent van Gogh, Dutch, 1853 - 1890

Oil on canvas, 25 7/8" x 31 1/4"

Van Gogh Museum, Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Psalm 133 gives us two similes to describe the experience of people living together in unity, in harmony, in love. Here Vincent van Gogh gives us a visual description of the same, of the beauty and simplicity of community life that captivated him. In 1885 van Gogh visited the town of Hoogeveen in The Netherlands and painted a series of studies of frame cottages in the area.

Writing to his brother Theo, he described the cottages as "four little human nests." He thought of them as symbols of comfort, shelter, and unity. This particular cottage housed two

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families, suggested by the two front doors and the shared split chimney. Van Gogh likened it to an elderly couple, “worn with age, who have grown into one being and are seen leaning on each other.”

In three short verses, Psalm 133 provides a meditation on the blessing and goodness of kindred living in unity. In the context of the psalm “kindred” can mean both an individual family and the human family. This psalm is one in the collection known as *Songs of Ascents*, originally sung by pilgrims journeying to the temple in Jerusalem. Images of family life are woven throughout many of these psalms, which could have created pictures of corporate identity in the pilgrims’ imaginations.

The primary source about van Gogh is his more than 800 letters to his brother, Theo, a Dutch art dealer who saved them. Theo provided Vincent with continuous emotional and financial support so that Vincent could devote himself entirely to his painting. Only one of Vincent’s paintings sold during his lifetime. Theo died six months after Vincent at the age of thirty-three, owning practically all of his brother’s artwork. Theo’s widow, Johanna van Gogh-Bonger, preserved the brothers’ letters and worked for years to promote Vincent’s work.

— *Art curated and narrative provided by Norman Mahan*
Document edited and produced by Donna V. Adair
Lay members, St. Paul’s United Methodist Church, Houston

Acts 4:32-35

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

Psalm 133

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.

1 John 1:1-2:2

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life

— this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us — we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

John 20:19-31

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”

After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord.

Jesus said to them again, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, “Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.”

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, “We have seen the Lord.”

But he said to them, “Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe.”

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them.

Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, “Peace be with you.”

Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe.”

Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!"

Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.