

Costly Commitment

October 8, 2006

(Pentecost 18 - Year B)

Mark 10: 2-9

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

For those of you who have not heard by now, I am a graduate of the University of Texas.

And, along with that, I am committed to Texas Longhorn football.

Now, I am not as crazy about pro football, but college football can really get my blood pumping.

Yesterday, at Camp Allen, was the consecration of Dena Harrison, as our newest Bishop in the Diocese of Texas.

When Dena was elected last April, it was announced that her consecration would be on October 7th.

Immediately, my heart sank, because I knew that it was the same day as the Texas-Oklahoma football game.

Because of my commitment to UT football, I resigned myself to follow the Longhorns on the radio.

So, I had looked on-line this past week, to see which radio stations between Waco and Navasota would broadcast the Texas-OU game on Saturday.

The Bishop's consecration service began at 11:00 in the morning, and the kickoff was at 2:30 pm.

My goal was to be home in time to at least see the second half of the OU game on TV.

The Consecration of a Bishop, however, is a very lengthy liturgy.

And, as I went up to receive communion, another priest, who is also a committed Longhorn fan, tapped me on the arm.

This priest flashed me the trademark Hook 'Em Horns sign, then shook his head disappointedly as he pointed to his watch.

After the worship service, Susan and I attended the luncheon in honor of

our new bishop, then I hurried to the car, just in time to hear the kickoff of the Texas-OU game on the radio.

I headed up Highway 6 back to Waco, intently listening to the Horns on the radio, still determined to get home to see the second half of the game on TV.

I commented to Susan about how pleased I was with how Texas was doing and about how pleased I was that we were making great time on the road.

Then, just outside of Marlin, my commitment to UT football ran headlong into the law.

I saw the flashing lights of a Texas State Trooper, and I knew that I was busted.

When I rolled down the window to give the trooper my driver's license and insurance card,

The trooper looked at my clerical collar.

Sitting right beside me was a worship booklet that said on the cover:

“The Ordination and Consecration of a Bishop.”

The State Trooper asked me:

“Sir, is there some emergency or critical event that you are heading to?”

A part of me wanted to say:

“Yeah, there's an emergency.

I gotta get home to see the end of the game!”

But, the ethical side of me prevailed, and I sheepishly replied:

“No, sir. There is not.”

My commitment to University of Texas football cost me a speeding ticket on Highway 6 yesterday.

(But, I must say, that I *did* make it home in time to see the fourth quarter!)

Commitment, as a football fan, can be costly.

And, commitment, in a marriage, can be costly as well.

In today's Gospel reading, Jesus is asked by the Pharisees a trick question about divorce.

But, rather than answering the question directly, Jesus begins his answer by teaching about God's intentions for marriage.

Jesus teaches about marriage, by quoting from both of the stories of creation in the Book of Genesis.

Jesus then says:

“Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate.”

Up until this point, the Jewish people were following the law of Moses, as written in the Old Testament Book of Deuteronomy.

In this ancient law, a man could issue a certificate of dismissal in order to divorce his wife.

The cause for the divorce was determined by the husband.

The man had the upper hand, the man came up with the reason for the divorce, the man had all the power.

But, Jesus puts marriage into a brand new light.

To Jesus, both the man *and* the woman are created equally, in God's image.

To Jesus, both the man *and* the woman make a costly commitment, to become one flesh.

For, to Jesus, what God has joined together, no one can separate.

When we come together to witness and bless the marriage of a man and a woman at a wedding, we witness the vows that they make to each other.

A married couple is asked, by the officiant:

“Will you love her, comfort her, honor and keep her, in sickness and in health;

And, *forsaking all others*, be faithful to her as long as you both will live?”

Forsaking all others means, obviously, no extramarital affairs.

Forsaking all others also means an unwavering commitment to another person, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part.

Forsaking all others means a costly commitment.

Commitment, as a football fan, and in a marriage, can be costly.
And, commitment, to be a Christian is costly as well.

You might not hear this language much in the Episcopal Church,
But, in other churches, you will hear folks talk about how important it is
for you to make a commitment to Jesus Christ as your personal
Lord and Savior.

Even though that wording might make some people feel uncomfortable,
there is truth in the reality that Jesus asks us to make a costly
commitment to him and to the ministry that Jesus calls us to.

Jesus asks us, in his Gospel, to deny ourselves and to take up our cross
and follow him.

Jesus asks us to forsake all others and be faithful to him as long as we
shall live.

Jesus asks us to make a commitment.

Now, I know that money can be a touchy subject for many people.
But, money, and how we use it, reflects our priorities and commitments.
All you have to do is to quickly review your checkbook and your Visa
statement to see where your priorities and commitments actually
do lie.

Yet, when you give your money back to God, through the ministry of St.
Alban's Episcopal Church, you are making a commitment to the
ministry of Jesus Christ as it is lived out in this place.

When you give your money back to God, you forsake all others,
forsaking the purchases of Starbucks lattes and other non-essentials
that clutter our lives.

When you give your money back to God, you make God a priority.

For, commitment, in marriage and as a football fan, can be costly.
And, commitment, as a Christian, is costly, as well.

Jesus is not looking for a luke-warm commitment.

Jesus is looking for *costly* commitment, as we give generously to his ministry.

Jesus is looking for *total* commitment, as we speed down the highway toward him, seeking his voice on any radio station we can find.

For, Jesus, on his Cross, makes a *costly* and *total* commitment to *us*,
A commitment, from Jesus, for better for worse, for richer for poorer, in
sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do meet.

AMEN.

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