

## **A Toast to Sacrifice**

*September 14, 2008*

(Pentecost 18 - Year A)

Romans 14: 1-12

*St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas*

After I graduated from the University of Texas in 1986, I moved back to Houston to work for Arthur Andersen.

After moving back to Houston, I became a member of St. John the Divine Episcopal Church.

St. John the Divine is a huge church with a lot of activities and groups. And, as a young, urban professional, I quickly became involved in the Young Singles Group at St. John the Divine.

The Young Singles Group was for singles between the ages of 22 and 35.

And, it was through this Young Singles Group that I met my wife, Susan.

One year, the Young Singles Group at St. John the Divine was approached by some other church singles groups in Houston, mainly singles groups from other churches "inside the Loop."

The idea that we were approached with was for many of the singles groups in Houston to come together for a huge New Years' Eve party,

To be a giant celebration with the unmarried Christian yuppies in Houston.

As a member of the leadership team from our Young Singles Group, I went to the organizational meeting to plan this New Years' Eve party, along with another member of our group named Yvonne.

Yvonne and I arrived at the First Presbyterian Church and were greeted by folks from the singles groups from St. Paul's Methodist, from Bethany Christian Church, from Second Baptist, and from a host of other churches.

The planning team for this giant New Year's Eve party began to run through the proposed details for the party.

We discussed invitations and publicity.

We discussed appetizers and buffets.

We discussed ballrooms and DJs.

Finally, I stated:

“Well, the one thing that we haven’t covered -

Is whether the party will have a cash bar or just beer and wine.”

In astonishment, the Baptists, the Methodists, the singles from the  
Church of Christ, all of them stared at me in disbelief.

One of the young women looked at me as if her eyes were going to drill  
a hole into me and replied:

“There will be *no* alcohol served.

This is intended to be a *Christian* New Year’s Eve Party.”

Yvonne, who had come with me to represent the Young Singles Group  
of St. John the Divine Episcopal Church, began to lobby for, at the  
very least, serving champagne for a toast at midnight.

Yet, the others would not budge.

Then, I began to invoke Scripture, stating that Jesus’ first miracle was to  
keep a party going by providing wine.

Yet, the others would not budge.

And then *they* invoked Scripture, as well, quoting passages from the  
Bible that speak against drunkenness.

Yet, *we* would not budge.

We went back and forth like this -

The Episcopalians vs. the other young singles groups, passing judgment  
on our brothers and sisters.

Finally, one of the Methodists cut to the chase and said to me and  
Yvonne:

“Well, let me ask y’all this question:

If we do not serve alcohol of any kind at the Christian Singles New  
Years’ Eve Party,

Then how many young, single Episcopalians do you think will attend?”

Yvonne and I glanced at each other.

Then, with a voice of truth, we replied in unison:

“None.”

Needless to say, the Episcopalians declined to participate in the all-Houston Singles New Year’s Eve Party.

Yet today, I am embarrassed to think that I was not willing to spend New Year’s Eve 1987 with a glass of sparkling cider in my hand. I am embarrassed by how I judged my fellow Christians, who honor God, just like I do.

And I am embarrassed by how the other Christians judged us Episcopalians, who honor God, just like they do.

The Apostle Paul, in writing his Letter to the Romans, understands that different flavors of Christians honor God in different ways. Paul tells us that some Christians in ancient times will eat anything. While other early Christians were vegetarians, vegetarians even before it was cool.

Paul tells us that some early Christians observed the Sabbath day and other holy days in the calendar.

While other Christians treated every day as if it is the same.

And fast-forwarding St. Paul’s examples ahead two thousand years:

Some Christians drink champagne at New Years’ Eve parties.

While other Christians drink sparkling cider.

Some Christians condemn the practice of abortion.

While other Christians support freedom of choice.

Some Christians only ordain unmarried men to the priesthood.

While other Christians elect a married woman to the office of Presiding Bishop.

Yet all of us, all of us, practice our faith in honor of the Lord.

The Apostle Paul tells us that as long as all of us strive to honor the Lord in our actions,

Then, who are we to pass judgement on the practices and beliefs of someone else?

For as followers of Jesus Christ, it is much easier for us to major in the

minors.

It is easier to complain about the difficulty of the hymn tune - than to do the difficult things that the words of the hymn ask us to do.

It is easier to fight over theology - than to visit those in prison.

It is easier to argue about sex - than to give our money to the poor.

It is easier to walk away from this church and from this Table -

Than to kneel down with people who are diametrically opposed to our opinions and beliefs.

When I was 23 years old, I walked away from a table of diverse brothers and sisters who were just trying to celebrate one New Years' Eve together.

And, now that I am 44 years old, I would like to think that I have grown a bit spiritually.

I believe that if that situation would have happened today - that I would act differently and would have worked harder to be a part of that New Years' Eve party.

But, in order for me to be the kind of Christian that the Apostle Paul is referring to -

That means that I have to be willing to lay aside my beliefs and my judgments and my opinions for the sake of unity.

To be the kind of Christian that Paul is referring to -

That means that I have to stop judging the practices of others and that *I* must be the one to budge.

To be the kind of Christian that Paul is referring to -

That means that I must sacrifice.

The Rev. Dr. Wes Eades is teaching us now in Adult Sunday School, teaching us that the Christian life is based upon sacrifice, upon sacrificial love.

And to take up the Cross of Jesus Christ means that *we* live a life of sacrifice.

To take up the Cross of Christ means that I will crucify my opinions, my beliefs, my political leanings, my very life, in order to live in unity with all of you who honor God in your own ways.

For to take up the Cross of Christ means that I lift high my glass *{lift up glass}* of non-alcoholic cheer, spiked with a bit of humble pie, for a toast:

To sacrifice, to unity...and to love.

AMEN.

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