

Cybercolumn by Jeanie Miley: The Tie that binds

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CYBER COLUMN: The Tie that binds

By Jeanie Miley

On the first Sunday of Advent, I sat in my regular place in the sanctuary of my church, looking around at all of the people who form my community of faith and anticipating the coming Christmas season with eagerness and joy. I know some of the people with whom I have gathered for worship really well, and they know me. Others are still strangers to me, even after all these years, and I often wonder if that is simply choice or if it is, somehow, a kind of failure.

Jeanie Miley

I've served on various committees with many of these people, and we have met for prayer and projects, banquets and business meetings, fellowship dinners and the usual funerals, weddings and baby dedications that mark the passage of time and the meaning of community.

As I look up and down the rows of people, there is one thing I know for sure, and that is that if we talk long enough with each other or work on enough projects together, we will find places where we simply do not

agree.

Some of us want one kind of worship, and if you take a poll on any given Sunday, you'll find some who want the exact opposite form of worship. Some just do not care, as long as they don't have to pray in public or listen to a fight about styles of music, forms of preaching or whether you call the Lord's Supper an ordinance or a sacrament. Some among us love observing Advent, and others—well, they like the music and the greenery, but wish we wouldn't call it Advent.

There are some of us who interpret the Bible one way, and others lean more to the right or to the left, at least in their opinions about the Bible. Some folks have more opinions about the Bible, I've noticed, than they do real knowledge of it, and sometimes that causes a kink in the ties that bind us.

Those of us who grew up Baptist are pretty settled in our ways about the form of church governance we will tolerate and support, and those who came from other denominations or no denominations either shuffle through our processes, dazed and confused, or they try to impose their understandings of polity and policies on the tense moments of decision-making.

We who went to Training Union even have a jargon that separates us from the new Baptists, many of whom do not want to be asked to join anything resembling an organization, and all of us tend to forget that the church is intended to be a living organism with Christ as the head and the rest of us, the feet and hands, eyes and ears and voices of the One whom we say we serve.

However many are our areas of disagreement, there is one thing that draws us together every year and that is our common belief in Jesus Christ. However we understand that relationship with the Living Christ who dwells

within us and between us, around us and among us, it is that common commitment to him that holds us together and unifies us, even in our diversity.

And so it is that we need to come together every year to celebrate that one magnificent Truth that ties us together in a voluntary bondage of love. We need to remember why it is we gather together, and we need to affirm that it is Mystery and Wonder happening outside the boundaries of reason and logic that hold us in this precious relationship we call church.

Maybe if we spent more time affirming that which we do agree about, the things we don't agree about would not be quite so big.

Jeanie Miley is an author and columnist and a retreat and workshop leader. She is married to Martus Miley, pastor of River Oaks Baptist Church in Houston, and they have three adult daughters. Got feedback? Write her at Writer2530@aol.com.

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