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Reintroducing the Language of Sacrifice

By Brian Bauknight

I have never been an enthusiastic fan of the word “sacrifice” because so few church members in this culture understand or appreciate the term or its implications. In the early 1990s, a consultant in a capital funds campaign urged the use of the slogan, “Not equal gifts, but equal sacrifice.” While I understood the intent, I resisted the highly visible use of this phrase, and did not use it in my own preaching on behalf of the campaign.

Nevertheless, I am convinced that the Christian community must reintroduce this word into our vocabulary for the time ahead – and soon. Our nation’s challenges and possibilities will not be attained without a willing, even glad, surrender of prideful abundance – and some clear sacrifice. Throughout the recent economic recession, no one has dared to ask America to consider sacrifice in order to attain a greater good. Some have admitted “thinking” sacrifice, but are embarrassed to bring the subject to the table. Such reticence may be motivated by fear or political expediency? I find this frustrating and unacceptable.

I have lived long enough to remember the kinds of goods and services Americans gladly forfeited during World War II (auto fuel, sugar, meat, etc.). My recollection is one of positive, even joyful, giving-up of these things so that a greater good might be attained. I also remember Viet Nam and other recent wars when we refused to let these tragic conflicts interfere with lifestyle choices and ongoing economic growth. There was no call to sacrifice among those who were not directly involved in the war itself.

No matter what the final policy details may bring with regard to health care, poverty, or education in this country, some forms of sacrifice will be required. Our job as Christian leaders is to incorporate the value of sacrifice, surrender, and letting go into the working vocabulary of Christian discipleship. And to make those words part of a joyful passion for righteousness (“right-ness”), compassion, and justice in the years ahead. The followers of Jesus must lead the way in word and deed. We must speak the language of sacrifice – for our own sake and for the sake of the wider world.

Brian Bauknight (DocBauk@aol.com) is senior minister emeritus of Christ United Methodist Church in Bethel Park, Pennsylvania, and coordinator of leadership development for the Western Pennsylvania Conference.

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