

## Preacher, Have a Drink!

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Can you handle another story from my days as student pastor in Waynoka, Oklahoma? I hadn't been there more than a few weeks when my phone rang late one Saturday night. It was Erma. She said, "Ira's at the 'Longhorn.' He's drunk and they've taken his keys away from him. Can you go down there and bring him home?"

I'd never been in a tavern in my life. I had visions of a dark room smelling of stale beer; a jukebox blaring another "somebody-done-somebody-wrong" song; a bunch of drunks lying face down in their own spilled beer, or smashing chairs over each other's heads. I was scared to death!

But I went. And as I was driving, I was wondering if it was too late to change vocations.

What I found was very different from what I expected. Oh, it was dimly lit, and the jukebox was blaring. I think the song was something like "I've got tears in my ears from lying on my back, crying over you."

But the people inside were quite civil; they were talking to each other—not breaking beer bottles over each other's heads. And there was a lot of laughter. And although most of them were quite 'happy,' I think Ira was the only one in the room who was really drunk. He spotted me before I saw him. I was scanning the room, trying to adjust my eyes to the dim lighting, when I hear a loud, slurred, "Hello, Preacher! Pull up a chair! Have a Drink!"

I declined the drink, and it took a little while, but I finally talked him into letting me drive him home. Erma and I put him to bed, and then I drove her back to the Longhorn to get her car.

Do you remember the TV series, "Cheers!"—named after a real neighborhood tavern in Boston. Now, I don't want to glamorize a bar; but do you remember the theme song: "Sometimes You want to go where everybody knows your name." And inside 'Cheers!' there was a community. Everybody knew everybody's name.

Sam Malone was the owner, an Ex- Red Sox relief pitcher until alcohol drove him out of baseball. ...a real ladies' man.

"Woodrow Tiberious Boyd" was a bartender, a dumb farm boy from Hanover, Indiana (the place mat capital of the world). Frasier Crane was a psychiatrist who needed psychiatric care; Carla was the waitress with a house full of kids back home. And there's Cliff, the know-it-all letter carrier, and Norm, the underachieving executive who's full of one-liners, and Diane, the airhead blonde Sam hires to keep books, and the romantic interest in the show.

There's community there: they know each other's names, they know and care about each other's family.

It's not the kind of community I'd hold up as a model for the church; but I have to admit that I found community in the Longhorn Saloon in Waynoka, Oklahoma. The dynamics were not altogether dissimilar to this description in our text:

(ACTS 2:42-47 NRSV) *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. <sup>43</sup>Awe came upon everyone, because the apostles were doing many wonders and signs. <sup>44</sup>All who believed were together and had all things in common; <sup>45</sup>they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. <sup>46</sup>Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup>praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.*

Two words capture my attention in this text. The first word is "devoted." They "devoted" themselves...

Those folks at "Cheers", and at the Longhorn Saloon in Waynoka were "devoted". They wouldn't dream of missing a night with their friends—especially that friend with the long neck.

Now, you can find examples of devotion all around. Go out to the Sports Complex almost any night during the summer. The kids wouldn't dream of missing a baseball game; nor would their parents or grandparents or coaches. They can be depended upon to be there very time.

And there's community there. It's not just the game. Those moms get up in the stands and talk about the moms who aren't there. They share. They care. They really do. They're community: everybody knows your name.

And in basically every season of the year you'll find that same degree of devotion at soccer fields and basketball courts and football fields. It's a good human quality, and you find examples in every city and town. There's very little question that almost everybody is devoted to *something*.

In the Scripture this morning, the Christians were devoted to...

- The Apostles' Teaching.
- The Fellowship. The word is Koinonia (κοινωνία.) It means "common"—to hold something "in common". It's the basis of several English words: "community", "communion", "communication", "commonwealth," and "communal. It's a wonderful quality; and they were devoted to that.
- The Prayers—probably daily prayers recited by Jews three times a day.
- The Breaking of Bread. We know from several sources that a common meal was a central part of early Christian worship. They broke bread and "remembered" their Lord.

The second word that attracts my attention in this text is the **word**, "to-

gether." Those people at "Cheers", and at the Longhorn Saloon in Waynoka, were together, too; like those folks at the baseball parks and the soccer fields and the basketball courts and the football fields.

There is value in spending time alone with God, but there is a qualitative difference when God's people come together. The New Testament word we translate "church" means, literally, "the gathered", "those who gather".

It's one of the most important words in the **New** Testament. Paul uses it in Ephesians: *And (God) made known to us the mystery of his will ...to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. (Ephesians 1:9-10 NIV)* The mystery of God's will: to bring all things together!

In the opening verses of Genesis God creates a human. And then **God** says, *"It is not good for the human to be alone. I will make a companion suitable for him."* (Genesis 2:18 NRSV)

It was God's intention from the beginning that humanity live in community. And in Jerusalem, on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit gave birth to the church, they were "all together."

But, maybe we draw lines too **sharply**. For a couple of generations, the public has heard the church saying those other expressions of community aren't valid. In fact, those expressions actually compete with church (and they do); and therefore, are evil. I've heard sermons—I've preached sermons—that said that.

But as I reflect on that night at the Longhorn Saloon, I've seen church board meetings that reflected less community. It occurs to me that one of the reasons—not the only reason; but, one of the reasons—Ira was at the Longhorn was because he wouldn't have been welcome at the church—unless, he sobered up and cleaned up, first. That's the message that's being heard: "Clean up your act; jump through the hoops; then, you can come to church."

It's interesting that on the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came and the disciples began to speak so that people of different languages heard the disciples in their own language, the public's **response** was, "These men are drunk!"

That's how the church began: they were devoted; and they were together. And the world thought they were drunk.

When I served the church in Pine Bluff, a couple started visiting our church. After a few weeks, I visited in their home, and they said, "This is the church we've been looking for! But it's the best kept secret in town!" No comment I've heard about a church I was serving hurt worse! I'd rather people think we're drunk!

The text ends with these words: "...day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved."