



## **Sermons**

### **from Northwood United Church**

**“Wake up and set the table.”**

**Isaiah 40:1-11, Mark 1:1-8**

**Will Sparks**

**December 4, 2011**

May the words of my mouth, the meditations of our hearts and the actions of our lives be acceptable in your sight, O God, our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

“Well that will have to do for now.” John looked like the abominable snowman as he shook himself off in the front hall. “It’s comin; down so fast out there that I’ll have to shovel again in a half an hour.”

Marg couldn’t help worrying a little when he said this. She knew better than most how hard shoveling snow can be on the heart, and he always went at it so hard, but she kept her worry to herself. It was his contribution to the evening preparation and she appreciated it. He’s make sure they all had a snowless place to park, and make sure the mulled wine was just as it had been for the last 22 years. She’d take care of dinner. That was their system- ran like clockwork for 22 years straight with the exception of a year off when they were in Arizona and a year off when John had had his bypass surgery. Now there was an unforgettable Christmas.

Now let’s see. Eleven places this year I think. It had been pretty consistently twelve over the years. Ten the year that the Murphies had their third child and had to be at Children’s Hospital over the Christmas season. It had been down to six the year that it seemed like there had been a two for one sale on mid-life crises. That was the weirdest annual Class of ’77 Christmas dinner of all. Two of the six couples had been in various stages of breakdown. Carol and Bernie decided that neither of them would come, but Denise decided that she was coming and Marv could just go to... That break up ha been of the most bitter kind, and nobody could tell Denise that it takes two to make it and it takes two to break it.

Actually, looking back on I now, that had been one of the only times when she had dreaded the traditional dinner. Usually she loved it, but that had felt like preparing for the last supper- like somebody was going to be crucified when it was all over and she didn’t know who. Hoped it wouldn’t be her.

But that had been the year from hell Christmas dinner. They hadn’t all been that hard. After the mid-life dust had settled there had been some wonderful dinners, The year Darcy and Bob had just returned from Brazil it had been like a fiesta! Preparing for that one had been a piece of cake. They’d brought a slideshow and a projector and with the exception of the minor altercation when Bernie had made that comment about being sick and tired of bleeding heart liberals going off to take pictures of poor people so that they could come home and make the rest of us feel guilty for being born in Canada, yes, other than that, it had been a wonderful year.

Now, let’s see. Eleven around the table means two leaves. And I’ll ask John to make sure Donna sits beside me. She and Dale just married in May and she’ll be feeling like she’d the odd one out, and under scrutiny, so if she sits beside me, I’ll be sure she feels welcome. And I’ll have to make sure Bernie and Darcy have at least one person between them so that they don’t get into their political wrangling. He just bates Darcy mercilessly. Always has.

And then there’s the question of drink. There’s alcoholic punch and the non-alcoholic variety. And the mulled wine of course. There was the year we had decided to go completely non-alcoholic so that Bob would have no temptation. He’d only been dry for six weeks and we decided that that was one thing we could do to support him.

Better baste the turkey again. Only an hour before people start arriving. Turkey- a good safe Christmas meal. It's good to play it safe when it comes to this particular meal. Remember the year I decided to try ham. There's no rule that it has to be turkey! But I should have through that one through a little better. Maurine told me the name of her new partner, and that should have tipped me off. How stupid of me to have ham when you know that Benjamin Goldstien is coming to dinner.

Now let me think. Table set. Salad in the fridge. Squash done and in the oven. Potato casserole done. Turkey basted. Music. Right. We need some music to prepare the air. Christmas lights on. Candles lit. There's something about candles that opens the heart. Bread in to warm. Wine ready. All prepared to way we have always prepared it. And with a little prayer before the first guest arrives. "God, the meal is now ready. But you know better than I that when this group gathers we need more than food. We need grace. So come. Be our guest, that your peace, your joy, your love might be born here at this table."

Friends, you are not John the Baptist out in the wilderness preparing by wildly calling for revolution. Nor are you Isaiah preparing the people for a difficult return to their homeland. No, you are you, in the particular wild and glorious life that is yours. But the process is the same. It was a yearly act of faith for John and Marg and it is a yearly, or perhaps daily act of faith for each one of us. It was like God says to us, "prepare as best you can. Prepare for peace to be born among you and within you. Try to make allowances for the particular kind of chaos that marks your life and the life of those around the table- set the stage for a meal that matters. Trust me to do the rest." Amen