

I want to tell you about the very first conversation I had with Christina when she first expressed interest in the position of Minister for Children, Youth and Families. I don't think we had posted the position formally yet, but news travels fast in the church, especially when there is full time ministry work with children and youth. We were about to post one of perhaps three full-time positions in all of the lower mainland.

I got a call on the phone; it was Christina. She reminded me of how we'd first met. She was from Summerland. "You might remember my mom and dad, Kim and Pat, from Summerland United Church." "Oh of course, your sister Pam babysat our boys and they played soccer with your brother Ben...and then there was Chrissy." "Ah...that would be me," she said. "My name is Christina." Duly noted I thought to myself and way better. I got a glimpse of what was to come.

We talked about Christina's work in the healing pathway at Naramata Centre, her degree from the University of Victoria, her work as a yoga therapist, her then most recent employment working with women with addictions and their babies at the BC Women's Hospital and Health Centre. We talked about her contract work at Mount Seymour United Church and her involvement in youth events in various parts of the church. I thought then, this may well be the person for us.

When I began to talk about church hiring systems and what might be beneficial for her as she proceeded to apply for the position, she stopped the conversation. "You know Blair, I have a lot of experience, and I bring some pretty good skills to the table." I was a little taken aback by the comment thinking I was simply trying to be helpful, offering what I thought was good counsel about the process. I don't even remember what I said, Christina, you might, but when I said "is there something behind that comment?" she was very forthright. "What you just said sounded like something my father would say. And that's not going to work."

How's that for in your face. What I thought was good counsel and compassionate, she experienced as arrogant and patronizing. We have laughed about it a lot since. It was a moment of boundary setting. It was a moment of staking her claim on her own gifts, her own wisdom, her own truth, which for me has become a gift for which I am deeply grateful.

As we have worked together, I have experienced Christina to be a formidable team mate. As I have dealt with the reality of my separation and my coming out, Christina has been an unbelievable pastor. And in her passionate cry for churches to be places of spiritual nurture and support of children and youth, Christina has left a legacy here that we ignore at our peril. How's that for in your face, indeed.

The text before us this morning is absolutely about places of humility and places of honour. Jesus is dining with the Pharisees, and why not. In his passion for bringing the practice of his tradition from the temple to the people, he is one of them. This isn't a casual dinner at the home of Mary and Martha, this is social event, and the community has gathered. Once again, Jesus notices the political manoeuvring, that dance of social propriety. Those with cache, those with prestige, those with money, those with power, those who influence decision-making, they take their places of honour, closest to the host. Those who do not, sit in the lower places.

Jesus notices something that prompts his teaching. He's probably hearing words like "Oh darling, lovely to see you again. We had such a wonderful time at your place last week. What a delight to be here. I love the changes you've made to your place. Is that a Monet?" It's the first century version of attending the A list dinner party. Jesus is there because they're watching him. The Pharisees want to keep this upstart close to them. Watching from a distance hasn't worked...so they bring him (and that messy, dirty, entourage - yuck) closer. You know the saying, "keep your friends close...your enemies closer." There's the picture. And true to the guy who has been turning the world upside down for two thousand years, Jesus says:

"All who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted. When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind."

Do you remember what happened that day in the synagogue when Jesus showed up after his baptism and had been tested in the desert? He read from Isaiah "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me: to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives, the recovery of sight to the blind. To set free those who are oppressed and to proclaim the year of God's favour?" Remember that? Luke is echoing it here.

"When you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind."

For just two years, Christina Kinch has been in our faces. With grace, with humour, with urgency, with unbending clarity Christina has said, the time has come friends, for the humble to be exalted for the exalted to be made humble. Let's not set a banquet table for those who can repay us, let's set the banquet table for those who are marginalized, sidelined, cast off. With a groundedness and clarity unlike any other late twenties adult I've ever known, Christina has been telling us, children and youth, have wisdom to teach us. They have a longing to nurture their spirits in places of authenticity and openness. If we're not that, they won't be here.

If what we say is true and honest. If we believe the United Church of Canada has a voice and a mission in the neighborhood of Lynn Valley then the places at the banquet must change. Those who are exalted must humble themselves, and those who have been humbled must be exalted.

If we are honest; if we believe that the gospel of Jesus Christ and the empowerment of our community is in our hands, then every conversation, every deliberation, every decision we make must be infused with the question "Is this decision in the best interests of the social, emotional and spiritual development of the children and youth? Or is this decision motivated by our own need of survival?" This is the litmus test for every decision. If we are honest!

In the gospel of Luke, there is a story about Jesus sending his disciples, two by two, into the towns and villages where he himself intended to go. He commissions them to travel lightly. He commissions them to bring peace to every household. He says; 'stay for as long as is appropriate; eat what's put before.' He commissions them to tell those in the household that the kingdom of God has come near. 'And if they don't hear you, leave well, let the dust of that experience remain.' Sound familiar?

Christina Kinch was called into the church, to bring the gifts that she's been given, to help us see the kingdom of God in this place in this time. She has offered us peace. She has offered us grace. She has been faithful. And she has been in our faces, in ways in which we have the least experience. And truly, I believe she has been right; the time has come, for the humble to be exalted for the exalted to be made humble.

And now, Christina Kinch is called out of the church. I also believe that. She is called to take her gifts, her passion, her clarity, and her learning to the intersection of spirituality and mental health. I trust deeply that what we have been given is pure gift. I trust deeply that what she has been given is pure gift also.

There can be no more humble an ending. For these gifts, thanks be to God. Amen.