

Karen Hollis | August 28, 2022

12th Sunday after Pentecost – Remembering Ted & Sandy

Luke 14:1, 7-14 (NRSV) On one occasion when Jesus was going to the house of a leader of the Pharisees to eat a meal on the sabbath, they were watching him closely. When he noticed how the guests chose the places of honor, he told them a parable. “When you are invited by someone to a wedding banquet, do not sit down at the place of honor, in case someone more distinguished than you has been invited by your host; and the host who invited both of you may come and say to you, ‘Give this person your place,’ and then in disgrace you would start to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit down at the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, ‘Friend, move up higher’; then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at the table with you. For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” He said also to the one who had invited him, “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. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

Ted and Sandy used to sit here (in the 2nd pew in front of the lectern) every Sunday. Unless they were in Greece or unwell, they never missed a Sunday. A few times a year Ted would meet me at the back of the sanctuary after a service and remind me that there are many interpretations available in a passage of scripture. On Sundays where I seemed particularly certain or was excited about a new idea, Ted would quietly approach me and remind me that a story has many layers. He loved theology and he loved to push the boundaries of theological interpretation with the help of his favourite authors.

Many of the books on his shelf were written in search of the historical Jesus; the authors research

and wonder at length about what we can really know about Jesus. They look at sources of history and dive deep into the scripture and pose substantiated questions about Jesus’ life and identity. They show us what we can learn about Jesus through this lens or from that vantage point. In preparation for this morning, I read some of these scholars and discovered a shocking theory about Jesus. What if Jesus was a Pharisee?

When I read this I had a very millennial response: “whaaaat?” That’s crazy. But in the spirit of Ted Brydges and scholars pushing the envelope of theology, I entertained the notion. The theory has been proposed by several scholars, but has, understandably, never taken hold . . . theologian Hyam Maccoby writes:

“The New Testament has put into the mouth of Jesus blistering denunciations of the Pharisees as hypocrites and heartless legalists, so that in the whole of the Western world, Christian and post Christian, it has become almost impossible to say with any hope of plausibility that Jesus himself was a Pharisee. Yet there is much evidence pointing in this direction.”¹

¹ enfleshed, August 28, 2022

While I'm not expecting to be convinced, I'm interested to read his book and hear his argument . . . in the meantime, this morning's text alone raises an interesting question: why would Jesus be invited to the home of a Pharisee to eat? I mean, why would he even get an invitation? It's possible that Luke wrote it that way for a reason . . . perhaps so they could tell the parable and include the bit about Jesus being carefully watched by the Pharisees.

But what if . . . what if Jesus is invited to a meal by the leader of his own organization. If he was a Pharisee, he would have been dangerous to them, because he was always looking at the tradition and identifying its inconsistencies, pointing out its contradictions. The Jesus we know was constantly working to reclaim the essence of Judaism and offering a faith that brought life and hope to people, rather than putting up barriers to God. As a Pharisee, he would have been critical of his own . . . and who among us hasn't been in that position?

What if Jesus arrives at the home for a meal, and as he watches his colleagues scramble for the place of honour at the table, he recalls Proverbs 25:6-7, a teaching of their own tradition: "Don't work yourself into the spotlight; don't push your way into the place of prominence. It's better to be

promoted to a place of honor than face humiliation by being demoted." What if he turns this proverb into a parable and offers a teaching to his own? Jesus as a Pharisee . . . would be very dangerous, indeed.

But when I read the parable itself, I thought, what a fitting text for our friends . . . particularly Sandy. Given all the places at the table to choose from, she certainly would have chosen the most humble. Given an invitation to move up to a place of honour, I imagine her saying, "No, I'm fine right here . . . thanks dear - I'm just part of the woodwork." I can't tell you how many times I heard her say that.

Like the woodwork she was extremely reliable in offering quiet and substantive support. When I first arrived here, I would see glimpses of her on Sunday mornings setting things up and tidying things away. It took a few years for me to get my head around her Sunday morning contributions because they would be done before I realized something was happening. Honestly, I wouldn't be surprised to find out that some things are no longer being done. Sandy never made a fuss . . . she just went about her work, as if it was nothing. But it was something . . . it was something to us. I don't know if all the words of thanks and appreciation in the world could have helped her understand her value

at Christ Church. And not just for what she did, but for who she was. She was very easy to be around, so down to earth, and had such a practical and generous attitude.

For years Ted hosted a book study out in the church hall. He and Sandy would sit at the table with interested congregants and talked about new and progressive ways of understanding Jesus and our Christian tradition. Sometimes when I think I'm pushing the boundaries of theology with the congregation, someone will come up to me after worship and say, "I remember learning about that in Ted's book group!" Thank you, Ted, for gifting us with your love for ideas and emerging ways of understanding our faith.

It's tough to lose one of them . . . and we lost both of them in the same year. As with all the people we've lost along the way, we will miss them . . . and we will carry with us our memories, our gratitude for their lives, and the ways in which they helped shape our congregation. Thanks be to God for our friends.