

## Sermon Preached on October 10, 2021 – Fourth Sunday of Creation

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Genesis 1:20-23

Psalm 104:25-35, 37

Mark 10:17-31

Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields, for my sake and for the sake of the good news, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this age—houses, brothers and sisters, mothers and children, and fields with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. ~ Mark 10:30

My first challenge was to figure out what “fields with persecutions” are. Turns out it’s a punctuation problem; there should be a comma after fields, meaning that all these blessings that come from following Jesus in this life will be accompanied by persecutions. The disciples and other followers will be persecuted for their blessings. With blessings like these, who needs curses, hmm? But of course then there’s eternal life, whatever that may mean. Of course, in God’s house are many mansions, and mansions may be an upgrade from houses. Although according to commentaries I’ve read in the ancient past, mansions really means waystations. But I digress.

I returned Friday from a couple of days in Boston. One of my missions was to spend the night with a couple friends, Ken and Jim. Some of you have met them, in fact Ken has played the piano here once or twice when I have been celebrating. I’ve known these two for more than 15 years. I met Ken first at a fundraiser for Marriage Equality in Massachusetts. He and Jim had met at Trinity Church in Boston and were attending there. I said, you ought to come to my parish in Jamaica Plain some time. Sure enough they showed up at St. John’s one Sunday – the Sunday before the Christmas pageant, as it happened. So the next week they both showed up wearing fairy wings and told me, ‘We are the angels.’ And so I knew at once that I would love them.

They had a way of lightening up any room, any occasion. They were funny and smart and gave great parties, big and small. They got all involved in parish life. Jim headed up buildings and grounds and then became Senior Warden. Ken joined the choir and eventually became my minister of music for the last 7 years of my tenure in Jamaica Plain. He remembers that I told him once, I could hire a better organist, but you have the gift of hospitality. And he did. He could invite the congregation into a mood of co-operation and joy as he taught them new hymns or anthems.

They became very good friends to Sam and me. Our family took a trip with them to the Galapagos, and as I said, once we’d seen one another in wetsuits there was not much to hide. And several years ago Sam and I went on a cruise with them in Istanbul, Greece, and Malta. I have always known that there were deep unresolved issues for them. For example, they’ve never married although they spend more time together than most married couples I know, and have undertaken many ambitious projects. Jim is an autism specialist and he and Ken founded a school in Guyana, South America for children with autism.

Their most recent enterprise has been to buy a beautiful house in Roslindale Massachusetts, renovate and refurbish it in exquisite taste, and turn it into an Airbnb. Their guests become like family for them, and now that they are specializing in longer-term rentals they are more like family than ever; the guests get to know one another and do things together.

But now there are snakes in this paradise. Ken and Jim's relationship is in its most dire crisis ever. There's more to it than you need or want to know. And the same is true for me, except that I am their friend, counselor, and priest, and they have honored me with their confidences. I don't know what's going to happen. But as I spent my recent hours in their house I could not imagine how they would ever dismantle what they have built together. There are 4 rented rooms; I've lost track of how many bathrooms, and an amazing built-out attic where they and their close friends like me can sleep. And every space is furnished and accessorized with artifacts from their 23 years of living and traveling together. Everywhere you look you see grace and elegance and surprising details and funny objects. You see their life.

After practicing my counseling skills with them these last several weeks, the theme of which has been find good therapists, I escalated to my priestly role. I suggested that they might consider what sins are contributing to their present sinkhole: stubbornness, pride, anger, secrecy and lies, denial? And so forth? And good luck with that?

I pray that they may find their way back to an appreciation of the gift of hospitality that their home incarnates. To bring them back to the love that has created a safe and gracious haven for so many, and to the blessings that they so richly deserve as children of God. In short, find their way back to each other and to Jesus.

Alleluia! Amen.