

# Remembering Father James Parker

By Charles A. Collins, Jr.

If one listens to the recordings of the 1977 Congress of St. Louis, that gathering of more than 2000 Canadian Anglicans and American Episcopalians concerned with the direction of their church, one will hear Father James Parker, then-rector of St. Mark's Episcopal Church, Albany, Georgia, offer a prayer and then the following observation:

We live, as we all are aware, in a tragic moment in the life and the history of the Episcopal Church. I've always felt that we ought to look for some good even in the greatest difficulties, and I have to say that coming from Georgia I do ... the kind of encouragement and consolation I find is the realization that a lot of you are beginning to learn what the word "secession" means.

For those who knew him, the remark was classic Parker, both in its appreciation for the South and for its quick wit.

Born Luther Wood Parker, Jr., in Charleston in 1930, he was graduated from Porter Military Academy, the University of South Carolina (A.B.), Virginia Theological Seminary (M.Div.), and Rosary College (M.A.L.S.), he married a lovely lady named Mary Alma Cole who bore him two daughters and served tirelessly alongside him. After his ordination to the priesthood in the Diocese of South Carolina on July 25, 1957, the Feast of St. James, he adopted the name of his patron — James — and served parishes in S.C., Indiana, Illinois and Georgia and also served as a librarian in Tennessee. Of Anglo-Catholic convictions and High Church inclination, he was made Master of the Province of the Americas of the Society of the Holy Cross (SSC) in 1977.

All of the preceding commentary would've constituted a distinguished career for an Episcopal priest of his day but, as he noted in his St. Louis remarks, the era around the 1970s were turbulent times in the history of the Episcopal Church (something that has not changed).



Father James Parker

Newman in 1845 but Newman, who reentered Holy Orders, wasn't married and clerical celibacy had meant that those married Anglican clergy wishing to go to Rome would do so as laymen. Until, as it were, Father James Parker.

Shortly after the St. Louis Congress Father Parker, who remained in the Episcopal Church, inquired of the Holy See whether or not he and other married priests might be able to be ordained as Roman Catholic priests. After a lapse of two papacies in 1978 following the death of Pope Paul VI and the 33-day reign of Pope John Paul I, approval came from Pope John Paul II. Father Parker resigned from St. Mark's Church and the Episcopal ministry in 1981 and was, with his beloved Mary Alma at his side, ordained a Roman Catholic priest on June 29, 1982, the first married Western rite priest in nearly 1,000 years. Father Parker was in his early 50s at the time and he continued in active ministry, serving as pastor of several congregations, most notably Holy Spirit Church on Johns Island, S.C., where he led a substantial building campaign. He

Clergy and laity who found that they could no longer in good conscience remain in the old church went a number of places. Some went to the Continuing Church that came out of the St. Louis Congress and then sadly fragmented, a few into the Reformed Episcopal Church, which had departed in 1873, others left Anglicanism or the church altogether. Through the years there had been Anglicans who "swam the Tiber" and became Roman Catholic, most notably among them John Henry

and Mary Alma also served as mentors to clergy and their wives who were serving under pastoral provision.

I first met Father Parker in the mid-2000s, although I really cannot remember where. We shared a love of our heritage and it may well have been at a meeting of one of the heritage societies to which we jointly belonged. Despite the fact that I am happily and committedly an Anglican, in the words of Bishop Cosin "Protestant and Reformed according to the principles of the ancient Catholic Church," Father Parker and I struck up a friendship through which I was blessed and I hope that he was as well.

Because much of my ministry has taken place in the context of hospice chaplaincy, he was a useful contact. One patient's daughter, sure that her mother would want her funeral mass said "the old fashioned way" asked me if I could call Father Parker to see if he could say it; I laughed and told her that I would because, "If you want a Roman Catholic mass said the old fashioned way, get a guy who used to be an Episcopal priest" — the lady, who remains a friend, saw the irony (unfortunately trouble with his knees prevented him from fulfilling the request). On another occasion, I called upon him when a Roman Catholic patient who was near death and needed sacramental ministry that I, as an Anglican, couldn't provide; he was very helpful.

I saw him at Mary Alma's funeral and it was clear that the loss of his longtime wife and helpmeet had taken its toll on him. Learning of his death on May 11 was bitter-sweet; I will mourn his passing but give thanks that I had the privilege of counting him a friend and, most of all, that he rests in the Lord.

*The Reverend Charles A. Collins, Jr., is vicar of the Church of the Atonement, a Reformed Episcopal parish in the Anglican Church in North America, in Mount Pleasant. He may be contacted at [drew.collins@gmail.com](mailto:drew.collins@gmail.com) and more information about the Church of the Atonement may be found at: <https://www.facebook.com/atonementrec/>.*

## Keeping Christian in a divorce

By Debbie Martinez

We all struggle with something in our lives and just because we are Christians doesn't give us a hall pass. However, it is because we are Christians that we should be able to handle our circum-



Debbie Martinez.

stances differently and that is because we have God in our corner. We have someone greater than our friends, family or in the case of divorce, our attorney. Going through a divorce can break your spirit, but it should only increase your faith, for it is God who will help you navigate the challenges it brings and bring you out of that darkness into new light.

Fear and hate can make people act in ways that make me shudder as a divorce coach. I see couples that treat each other like enemies, forget their responsibilities

as parents, use children as pawns in their twisted post-divorce game with their ex, lose respect for themselves by allowing drink, excessive shopping and even random sex to take control of their common sense and sadly, lose hope. I see them embrace the feelings of hate, bitterness, resentment and a hardened heart. But how would this picture look if these couples could have approached their uncoupling in a different way, a Christian way? Well, put very simply, "What would Jesus do?"

Even in your darkest times, you can be a shining light to others. Divorce is no different. Show others how Christians get through divorce by doing it God's way. How would He do that? Well, without a doubt, I know He would do it with compassion, love and forgiveness, with kindness and uprightness.

Let these things be your guiding light if you are facing a dark time in your life. Here are ten things that will help you divorce like a Christian:

- Ask God to give you wisdom and discernment.
- Don't be afraid or worried; give it to God.
- Know that He has a plan for you.

- Grow deeper in your faith by prayer.
- Be a servant to others.
- Pray for His perspective on this situation and His help.
- Count your blessings every day.
- We all make mistakes but when you do, correct them; this is true repentance.
- Continue to be the mother/father God intended you to be.
- Leave any retribution to God.

In James 1:22-25, this is what he says:

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it — not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it — they will be blessed in what they do.

It still stands true in a divorce. Going through a divorce does not entitle you to throw God's word to the curb. Continue to live by His word and find strength and, consequently, freedom in it. All things new

is His promise and he will take what others have meant for your harm and turn it into good. You are no longer a slave to the fear that divorce brings, for you are a child of God. There are valleys in all our lives but when you can change your perspective and see this through God's eyes, you will find a sense of peace that will carry you through. The devil will try to infiltrate during this time because it is the perfect venue for him to try to do his work but if you keep your eyes and heart on God, He will use this circumstance to strengthen and grow you, not propel you backward or tear you down.

Jeremiah 29:11-13 says,

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

He has a plan for you and perhaps showing others how to divorce like a Christian is part of it.

## How we approach work: Another lesson from Ecclesiastes

By Jack Hoey III

I was 16 when my father informed me that I needed to find a job by the time school let out for the summer. This was not a discussion and I knew it would not be sufficient to ask our neighbors whether they needed their lawns mowed. After an extensive job search (I drove to Chick-fil-A and asked for an application) I entered the workforce. Most of my friends were also getting their first jobs around that time. I remember a few who wanted to save up for a car and others who just wanted some spending money. Some of them simply were told, like me, that it was time. Few of us were very philosophical about the whole thing; we weren't really concerned with the "why" of work.

The Preacher is, though, and we should pay attention.

I think it's too easy to brush off some parts of the Bible (especially Ecclesiastes) as abstract and not particularly practical. In my experience, when people complain that something in the Bible isn't "practical," they really mean "I don't get it." That's fine — there's nothing wrong with not understanding how something can apply to our lives. But there are plenty of things in life that are relevant to us (and very practical!)



Jack Hoey

whether we understand them or not. I only understood about half of what was taught in my high school physics class, but that doesn't mean that only half of the laws of physics apply to me.

Asking about the "why" of work might seem like an abstract question, but remember: the Preacher is the wisest man who ever lived. Let's listen as he tells us what he has seen:

"Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from a man's envy of his neighbor. This also is vanity and a striving after wind. The fool folds his hands and eats his own flesh. Better is a handful of quietness than two hands full of toil and a striving after wind. Again, I saw vanity under the sun: one person who has no other, either son or brother, yet there is no end to all his

toil, and his eyes are never satisfied with riches, so that he never asks, "For whom am I toiling and depriving myself of pleasure?" This also is vanity and an unhappy business." Ecclesiastes 4:4-8 (ESV)

Let's put it this way: Some of us care about what everyone thinks. Some of us don't care about what anyone thinks. Some of us think only about ourselves.

If you're in the first category, you work because you want what your neighbor has. French philosopher René Girard called this "mimetic desire," the theory that all of our desires are imitative. In other words, the only reason we want things is because other people want them. Think of every commercial you've ever seen — what is the unspoken premise? "Look at these people enjoying this product. Don't you want it?" This sort of behavior is more overt when we're children (the toy a toddler most wants is the one someone else is playing with) but if we're being honest, we never really grow out of it.

We want what others want, simply because we think they want it.

We justify this to ourselves in all sorts of ways but the reality is that when we work out of envy, we become our neighbor's slave. We have

allowed them to have the final say on our contentment, and they don't even know it! We will never be satisfied because we have outsourced our happiness to literally anyone who has something we do not. Some of us (the Preacher would say all of us!) care about what everyone thinks.

The second category of people, on the other hand, are too easily satisfied. "The fool," says the Preacher, is mostly concerned with his next nap. If those of us who work out of envy care too much about other people, the fool's problem is that he doesn't care enough. Different translations interpret this verse differently. Some say that the fool will "come to ruin" or "ruin himself." But I think the ESV nails it — the fool literally devours himself. It is a picture of starvation. And if the fool has a family, his starvation encompasses them. Some of us don't care about what anyone thinks.

The third category consists of those who work only for themselves. The tragedy here, though, is not their greed, but the fact that they don't even realize that they are completely alone in life. Some of us think only about ourselves. It isn't enough to ask ourselves "why" we work; we need to ask ourselves "who" we are working for. 1 John 4:12 says that if we

love one another, God's love is made complete. In other words, we can't truly experience the love of God unless we love other people.

I think this is true of work as well. Unless our work is for someone else, we haven't experienced what it means to truly work. If our work is only for ourselves, then we haven't really stopped being teenagers, saving up for that car. Love gives itself away and so does work.

Besides, are we ever satisfied with ourselves? "I'm my own worst critic" is more than a cliché. I've written tens of thousands of words while here at Seacoast Church, including articles that have appeared in these pages and elsewhere. Do you know how many of those words I still look back on with satisfaction? Fifty-seven. Fifty-seven words, written in 2011 for a Christmas Eve invitation.

A few months ago, author Sam Sykes tweeted his six steps to becoming a writer: 1) write something 2) hate it 3) hate yourself 4) hate everyone 5) hate everything 6) get a cat I guess

I don't own a cat but the rest is pretty much correct. As a writer I can't look to my work to fulfill me and as a minister I doubt I'll be able to take solace in my "wealth."

But I'm not alone. I know my "who," though sometimes I forget why that matters. Sometimes I get discouraged and wonder if I'm doing work my family can be proud of. But about a year ago, I realized something: when I was little, I had no idea what my dad's job was. I knew a bit of what he did, but I certainly couldn't have written out his position profile. I didn't care what my dad did, I cared who he was. Your kids don't care what you do, they care who you are. You are Dad, or Mom. That's all they need.

I can hear some of you ask, "But what if I AM alone?" You aren't. You don't need to have a family to have a "who." Paul (who had no family) reminded us that the church is our family; we are all part of one body. When we serve others, we serve Christ.

I know my "who" because I've learned what it means to care about more than myself. And that's enough for me to get up in the morning, drive to work and write some words that I probably won't like very much when I read them tomorrow.

*Jack Hoey III is the minister of research and theology at Seacoast Church in Mount Pleasant, where he lives with his family; he may be reached at [jackhoey@seacoast.org](mailto:jackhoey@seacoast.org).*