

# Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

The Second Sunday after Pentecost: June 11, 2023

The Turquoise Table

Rev. Dr. Lois Williams

Good morning and welcome to the second Sunday after Pentecost. This begins the period known by the church as “ordinary time”. We have a few secular holidays strewn in such as Fourth of July or Labor Day, but for the church this is ordinary time, represented by the color green and hopefully spiritual growth.

I was a supply priest for the Diocese for eight years. I had interviewed at a few churches, and interned for a whole summer at another church without a priest. but nothing really felt right on both parties. But I will always remember one discussion I had with a vestry that I will not name. It was a long time ago, but it rather sums up our Gospel, in a way.

I met with this vestry who were really just wonderful people. Their church was not unlike us here at CTL: they were aging, their building was as well, and they really wanted a priest that would grow their congregation. They expressed that they had felt a little stranded by their previous experiences with other clergy, and, oh did I mention, they are running out of money.

No problem, I thought. I had walked the property, it was on a fairly pedestrian-used corner, not too far from a little convenience store. A light bulb went off in my head, The Turquoise Table!

Kristin Schell wrote a book about finding community and connection in your own front yard entitled *The Turquoise Table*. What she does is take an ordinary

wooden picnic table and paint it turquoise. She then explains: you place the table on the edge of your property where people can (due to the color, of course) see the table. Because you want to meet neighbors, you sit at your table when you can and talk to those who go by. You can give away small candies or have a bowl of fruit. The idea is that you start a conversation; you share a moment. You also have the option to just leave goodies; the idea then is to create safe space and maybe someone will receive a treat.

For a church, one could have volunteers sit at an appointed time, and the table can include the same type of give-away gifts, or if in an appropriate setting have sandwiches or essentials such as tooth brushes and tooth paste in those neighborhoods hit by the economic downturn.

The idea is to get to know your neighbors. It is one thing to sit in the pew on a Sunday and say you love your neighbor, but what about expanding that. So that was my interview's pitch, when asked about a program that might bring people into the church.

Well, what an exciting idea, they responded. "That sounds amazing! I know just where to get the table". Another one wanted to choose just the right color for the table. The group started talking about what foods they wanted on the table and whether they should put out a flyer.

Wow, I thought, maybe this is just the thing, and then, and then, they asked me the fateful question: What if someone comes to the table? What if they sit down?

Rather stunned I replied, that is the idea. You talk to them, you feed them, and maybe if it's right you invite them to church. That is the idea here, this is what you are asking to have happen. Grow the church, save some souls, be like Jesus?

Yes? With a blank look the senior warden looked at me and said, “we don’t want **them** here. What if **they** want to come in? What if they just want to use the bathroom? They are, after all, just walking down the street. We don’t know them.”

That just about summed up my interview.

*When the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, “Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?” But when Jesus heard this, he said, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice.’ For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners.”*

Jesus is making a reference to the prophet Hosea, a reading we did not include today.

*For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.” (Hosea 6:1–6 NIV)*

Jesus is trying to explain that his mission is to usher in the Kingdom of God. This involves forgiveness and healing through the mercy of God. It is not the burning of animals or giving of gifts to the altar as much as it is through relationships that God works.

It is not the how you praise God, or how you pray, but how you model God to others. We are entering a time in this country where things feel unsafe. We are, by social media, the news, and other means being asked to stay a divided people (whatever that means). Divided against political party, gender, race, education, financial status. This is not Jesus.

In our Gospel today, Jesus sits with whoever wants to meet him. Those he calls follow him, and he heals those who have faith. We don't hear Jesus interviewing or judging worthiness. None of us are perfect, yet through God's eyes all of us are loved. Yes, all of us are loved no matter what.

Please don't deny yourself a conversation with someone other than yourself. Approach them with curiosity, for what may seem odd today may become the norm tomorrow. We have to learn to get along, quiet our brains and open our hearts. We have to understand that God has been merciful to us and we therefore, through that understanding, are called to attempt to model that mercy out of thanksgiving back to God. This is better than the blood of bulls per the prophet Hosea.

This is a welcoming church and a welcoming Eucharist.

God sets the ultimate Turquoise Table. Happy Pride. Amen.