

Down Home: The passing of old friends

February 11, 2015

I lost two old friends this winter.

My friends encouraged and inspired me across almost three decades. They made me laugh and caused me to cry. They offered wisdom and insight. They comforted me on sleepless nights and amused me on sunny afternoons. I thought of them often and returned to them with happy anticipation.

I became acquainted with both of them about the same time, and I loved them from the start. They never strayed far away since the 1980s.

Not long ago, I took them to church on Sunday morning. And then I never saw them again.

Two Buechner books

Peculiar Treasures: A Biblical Who's Who and *Wishful Thinking: A Theological ABC*—both by author/theologian/preacher Frederick Buechner—have been two of my favorite books most of my adult life. I heard about Buechner when I was a seminary student. Joanna and our daughters, Lindsay and Molly, gave me copies of *Peculiar Treasures* and *Wishful Thinking* when the girls were little and I had hair. In other words, long ago.

In *Peculiar Treasures*, Buechner writes about all sorts of biblical characters. He takes them in alphabetical order and describes them creatively and imaginatively so they come alive and dance, march, strut, slump or crawl right across the very page. In *Wishful Thinking*, he does the

same thing, only with biblical concepts and ideals. Often, I learned more from Buechner's concise re-creations than I did from reading pages and pages of commentary.

So, they've been among my go-to books for Sunday school lessons and sermons and devotionals for years and years. On this particular Sunday, I taught a lesson from Genesis 18, where God and two other visitors show up at Abraham's and Sarah's tent and repeat the promise these two old coots will bear a son, and Sarah laughs at the very thought. *Peculiar Treasures'* entry on Sarah focuses on her laughter, and *Wishful Thinking* mentions this episode of laughter in the entry on hope.

Vanished

I took the books to church and read those passages to the class. Since they had to listen to me yammer on for 45 minutes, the least I could do was treat them to Buechner's divine imagination.

After class, I headed down to the worship center and laid the books and my coat on a pew to mark my place while I served as usher. By the time my duties were done, Joanna had laid the books and jacket under the pew. After church, I saw the coat and picked it up, but I did not notice the books.

Later that afternoon, I realized, "Oh, golly, I forgot my Buechner books." But it was Super Bowl Sunday, and I knew the church house would be all locked up.

The next day, I called one of my minister friends, Buzz, and asked him to look for my books. He searched where I sat in the worship center, ran upstairs and checked our Bible study classroom, and then checked in lost-and-found. No books. A couple of days later, I re-traced Buzz's steps. Still no books.

A famous online bookseller offers both *Peculiar Treasures* and *Wishful Thinking*. So, I know I can read them again someday. They'll always be part of my life. I'm still sad, though, because Jo and the girls gave me those copies. I've held them in my hands over and over and over. Sentimental and sappy, I know. But, hey, those are/were special books.

Buzz thinks the cleaning crew that comes to our church after Sundays must have disposed of my books. That means either someone stole them or threw them in the trash. I hope it's the former, because I'd much rather those lovely volumes inspire a book thief than molder for eternity in a landfill.