

Column

James Agee title “Let us now praise famous men” captures the spirit of his 1941 book in which he gives face and voice to impoverished tenant farmers during the Great Depression. This title is not original; rather, it is an exact quote from Ecclesiasticus 44:1. Ecclesiasticus (also known as the Wisdom of Sirach) is a book in the Apocrypha, a group of writings placed in some Bibles between the canonical Old and New Testaments.

Agee rightly turns the spotlight on poorest of the poor who do their best in the worst of circumstances, but of course one does not have to be in reduced circumstances to merit praise. Nor should the ‘men’ in this verse be understood as referring exclusively to the male sex. It is generic.

Today, I am thinking a woman in North Georgia who did not seek praise yet who falls into the category of “famous men.” I am thinking of Pat Webb, who departed this life unexpectedly Friday, June 5. Pat and her husband Joe were founders and

long-time supporters of the Blue Ridge Community Theatre.

I told someone a day or so ago that while Joe built sets at the theatre (which, I might say are better constructed than many houses in the area), Pat built people. Adults, yes, but young people in particular who attended the annual Sunny D Theatre Camp, which she directed for many years. It is a tribute to her that a number of leaders in this year's camp, (which began June 8) were once students under her.

Pat's people-centered approach was very evident to all. As children in the program eat breakfast at the church I serve, I have witnessed it firsthand. When she spoke to a person, whether a leader or child, she would focus on that one exclusively. In every case, she would listen and respond with encouragement.

Once after breakfast Pat took time to show a small girl the main church. As they were preparing to leave for the camp, Pat reported that she turned toward the Altar for one last look and said, "This is a Barbie church." Something about the beauty of the space created wonder and hopefully a desire to know

more about the One who the Source of all that is true, lovely and beautiful.

Pat's way with people might be compared with Barnabas in Acts in the New Testament. His name means "son of encouragement." Following Paul's Damascus Road experience took Barnabas provided support and introduced him to the other apostles in Jerusalem.

If Barnabas was a "son of encouragement", Pat was a "daughter of encouragement." She invested time in people and gave them a new confidence and a new vision of what they might accomplish in life. No one this side of eternity will know how many lives she touched.

Pat is no longer here to encourage, but you and I are. Might not the best way to praise and honor her is to become ourselves encouragers?

ALMIGHTY and everliving God, we yield unto thee most high praise and hearty thanks, for the wonderful grace and virtue declared in all thy saints, who have been the choice vessels of thy grace, and

*the lights of the world in their several generations;
most humbly beseeching thee to give us grace so to
follow the example . . . Grant this, O Father, for the
sake of the same, thy Son Jesus Christ, our only
Mediator and Advocate. Amen.*

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