

## **In support of my friend, Tony Jones**

My name is Rachel Swan and I am not a theologian or scholar. I do not have a professional relationship with Tony Jones. He has not been a colleague or teacher of mine, at least not in the traditional sense. I have no reason to write this other than a deep love and appreciation for my friend Tony.

While I can't recall the specifics of how I first met Tony, I do remember how I felt about him after being around him a few times; I didn't like him. At all. That was somewhere in the summer/fall of 2008. If you know Tony's business, then you know that I had the great misfortune of meeting Tony when his marriage was in full meltdown. I am the child of a horrible divorce. I remember—quite vividly—my mother's and father's utter misery during that time. Divorce sucks no matter the circumstances.

So while I can't remember the details of when we first met or even how I came to call him the friend that he is to me and my family today, I can tell you—without hesitation and with wholehearted support—I stand by him, by his beloved Courtney, and by his children. I do so because I know Tony to be a good man, an amazing father, and good friend. He answers when called. He tells truth when it is the last thing you want to hear. He is funny, generous, smart and an evangelist of all that is hopeful, good, and right in the world.

Perhaps it's a graceless thing to say, but I am gobsmacked by all the Christian / former-Christian / theology-interested, and church-related people blasting Tony, distancing themselves, or asking him to drag out the details of his personal life so the "truth" can be brought to light like some sort of church-circus-meets-trainwreck-spectacle. This is not the church or body of Christ I feel connected to. Rather this seems like the underbelly of the body of Christ. That stinky, embarrassing, fatty part of the body that rarely sees light. But Tony has done what most of us never have to do and aired it out. And right now, it's still smelly. But the smell will fade and the healing will begin. Let's be the people who look away from the spectacle and encourage the healing.

My hope and prayer is that Tony and his family can find a peace not yet found, and support from places they didn't know would come. Tony has that support, trust, love, and loyalty from me.