

## A HOUSE OF PRAYER FOR ALL PEOPLE

Haslett UCC – August 14, 2011

This morning I want to spend some time reflecting on God’s House—what is it, where is it, how do we “allow” all to be part of it?

Friday evening I attended the Great Lakes Folk Festival. Since my daughter was introducing acts on the City Hall Stage, that’s where I chose to be. The tent was full of people and on stage were five men with accordions. Granted, they were all Caucasians, but otherwise they represented four different ethnic backgrounds—Irish, Norwegian, the Balkans, and Cajun (Louisiana French). Two were very young, the others bordering on being old. (They were about **my** age!) Though they were very different, they all love to play the accordion. Though they were different, they were also one. They were united in music, the communication of the soul.

I wandered to the food area, feasting on Mexican food while I observed the amazing mix of persons enjoying the Festival. Here was the chubby middle aged couple from southern US sharing a huge taco salad. There, the slender African-American man with two kids and an older white friend, carrying a toddler. Here was a Hawaiian couple sporting beautiful leis and there, Asian teen-agers. Here, elderly and there, disabled. And **dogs!** There were dogs of every description. Everyone was pleasant, enjoying the beautiful evening, although we did slap at mosquitoes occasionally. I have to admit they were part of God’s creation that wasn’t so welcome. This beautiful blend of creation was sharing a house of prayer for all God’s people. I was almost overcome with gratitude.

One of the reasons I appreciate and respect this congregation is your willingness to include all people in your midst. I don’t see many different races or ethnic groups represented here **this morning**, but I know that at times there are Africans here and Muslims and perhaps others of which I am unaware. I have sat in this room clapping and tapping my feet to the rhythm of African drums, sharing smiles with people of dark skin and light, able bodied and not so able bodied, young and old and in between, male and female. I have heard prayers led by Jew, Christian and Muslim. What moves you to this openness? Is it a few who challenge you to involvement? Do most of you applaud the effort; find it of little interest; or resent the “intrusion” on a nice group of Anglo-Americans?

I find it interesting that even though we believe Jesus knew the Hebrew scriptures well, in today’s story he seems unwilling to include an ‘outsider’. Did he not know of the admonition in Isaiah: My house shall be a house of prayer for all people?

Was he in a bad mood that day? Maybe he was tired, burned out, cranky. It IS possible you know. Jesus WAS human. And so he basically calls the Canaanite woman a bitch—I don’t give food to dogs. And he mouthed these excluding words just after we’re told of his concern over what comes out of people’s mouths, as contrasted with the Jewish leaders’ concern for what goes into the mouth.

It was pretty amazing that this “woman” had the audacity to approach Jesus at all, let alone argue with him. Since women were not normally so forward in that culture, it was probably only

her desperation that gave her the energy and courage to throw herself in his path. Parents are like that, especially if their child is threatened. And, get this: Jesus CHANGED HIS MIND AND HEART!!!

What is God's House? Yes, it is in houses of worship. They represent the sacred, the holy places to connect with the Divine. But God's house is in your heart and mine, your home and mine, our communities, in nature, all over this planet, in the whole universe. Jesus **remembered**. He chose to let in the outsider. He lived trusting that God's house was a house for all! Will we do the same? Will we find one way, large or small, today or tomorrow or the next day, to share "God's house", wherever that may be, with all God's people?