

In our first lesson for this morning, we see that the great temple commissioned by King Solomon has been completed. The work is done, the clean up has been finished, all of the furnishings have been put into place, and the priests were busy preparing for the formal dedication. It had been years of planning, hard work, and preparation. On the day the temple was dedicated, and we don't know if it was in the order of service or not, Solomon stood in front of the high altar to pray. It was a shocking prayer because in all of the nations which surrounded Israel, the temples were off limits to the residents of that country, and certain off limits to any foreigner. For example, at the temple complex in Luxor there was a shrine dedicated to the falcon god Horus and about a mile away was a temple dedicated to his goddess wife Hathor. The pathway between the two was hidden by a high wall that not only kept people at a distance, but prevented them from even seeing what was happening inside. Every year there was a procession as a statue of Horus was carefully processed to Hathor, and the people could only hear, but not see the chants and prayers of the priests as they moved along the path.

The temple in Jerusalem was different. To be sure, there was the Holy of Holies which was so sacred only the chief priest could enter it to make the final sacrifice on behalf of all the people of Israel on the last minutes of the Day of Passover. But the rest of the temple was open to all Jewish men. Just beyond that was an area reserved for women. And even foreigners - tourists, merchants, or foreign officials - were allowed on the Portico of the Gentiles. By today's standards that might not seem very inclusive, but we can not judge past generations by our contemporary standards. In short, it was very inclusive compared to other sacred shines elsewhere.

I say that because we read Solomon's prayer - anyone who sincerely desires to learn about the Lord God, who is sincere about wanting to pray, and desires to convert to Judaism is welcome. The stranger is welcome in not only the land, but the most holy site in all of Israel.

That was radical inclusion and welcome.

It is radical inclusion and welcome that is our tradition here at All Saints. We make a very tangible statement on the marquee that our church is open around the clock for anyone seeking shelter, solace, a place to pray and meditate, and if it comes to it - to find sanctuary. We follow through during the week, and especially on Sunday. My prayer is that it never changes.

We imitate Solomon's precedent in welcoming anyone who wants to talk and find someone who will listen, during the week, as well as making our church facilities available to self-help groups. When I walk down to get the mail in the morning, or am out in the community at other times, if someone wants to talk - I am there with them. We don't just visit our own members at the hospital or retirement facilities, but anyone and everyone.

As I read that passage I instantly thought of something I read some time ago about the early history of Minnesota in the pioneer days of the 1840s. A passage caught my attention.

America was the great hope for millions of people, especially from Europe. For the Africans, of course, it was tragically different. Immigrants poured into this country in hopes of experiencing freedom, opportunity, and a chance to worship, think, and live as they chose. But, of course, they weren't always welcome, especially at first. When the Irish came the welcome mat was quickly withdrawn along the East coast. There were signs - no Irish wanted; Irish not served.

The Scandinavians experienced it; as did the people from the various small principalities in what is now Germany. My family came from Saxony, moved to Minnesota, and experienced discrimination. Later, of course, they were grudgingly welcomed, then accepted. And after them the people from SE Europe, from Italy and Greece, from Russia and the Ukraine, and Jews from eastern Europe all experienced that same rejection and discrimination. Many of them didn't know the language or customs. Some of them from Germany and Switzerland packed heavy flat rocks in their steamer trunks because they had been told that American soil was 10 feet deep and there weren't rocks in the country. To make sauerkraut they needed a heavy rock to keep the cabbage held down in the brine. Trust me, they soon learned they could have left the rocks at home.

At the time, in the 1820s until the end of the Nineteenth Century, the federal government wanted immigrants. The only qualifications were relatively good mental and physical health, and that they were not known criminals. But to pre-empt and buy their land they had to be citizens. The federal government was so eager for them to settle that they granted authority to postmasters and notary publics to grant naturalization status on the spot. Many of these officials carried the naturalization papers in their satchels. They bought their land, built their homes, worked in the factories, worked in the forests and mines, and established their businesses and companies. When the country needed them, they joined the armed forces, praying they would survive to return home and resume their life. If there was a job, despite low wages and dangerous working conditions, they took it. It wasn't because they wanted to live in poverty and risk injury or death, but because they believed it was the next step to experiencing the dreams they had when they left their homeland. They had hope; they had a purpose.

Good, wonderful things happened because the immigrant was welcomed, wanted, and treasured, and they held the vision that America was a land of opportunity.

That story continues today. So does the story of discrimination and fear, rejection and sometimes sheer blatant bigotry. It is the fear of someone who is different - not merely the colour of their skin or the accent in their voice, but a different culture or a non-Christian religion. Or, perhaps it is the fear of someone taking a job.

Well, let's think that one through in light of our experiences here this summer. When we tore off the old roof - three layers of shingles and then watched the new ones go up, there was a crew working here. Perhaps you saw them - men who didn't all speak English, working in the blazing hot sun up on our roof, risking life and limb 50 or more feet off the ground, trusting that the harness and rope would keep them safe. I saw people watching them work in awe, admiration, and even if they didn't always say it, grateful they weren't up there doing that job.

Entry level work, and yet burning within their heart and mind was perhaps the hope that one day they'd be the fellow down on the ground with a clip board. Maybe one day their children would own a company of their own. The same thing can be said about many jobs that most of us wouldn't choose for ourselves or loved ones: working in the food processing plants, recycling centres, or farm fields harvest the crops, or the cleaning crews that work during the night when no one is around, to name just a few. Yet, just as in the past, they are willing to do this work because they believe in the future.

I fully understand this is not 1840, and laws and public policy evolves and changes. But it is far more than law and public policy. Welcoming and including all people is a reflection of our beliefs as humans, and especially our values as disciples and followers of Jesus. This inclusion and a good heart belongs to us, and to use a modern phrase, we need to own it.

You and I know that what you and I believe, say, and do is unlikely to change and entire nation, but that isn't the point, and maybe it doesn't matter. Our goal is to be good at doing God's work. Rather, we put into practice what we read in this lesson. We put into practice the precedent established by St Paul when he invited Gentiles and non-Jews into what our Presiding Bishop calls today's Jesus Movement. We are doing Christ's work when we intentionally make ourselves vulnerable enough to include others. That, is the very ethos we pledge to fulfil when we renew our baptismal vows.

We open our hearts in compassion for the outsider and stranger, because we remember that when Joseph rushed his family out of Bethlehem and fled to Egypt because of the repression and violence of Herod, they were aliens in a foreign land. We do it because we imitate Jesus is caring for outsiders - the physically and mentally ill, children, and many others.

Very simply, it is a matter of living out our baptismal vows and participating in the two great commandments of loving God and all that He has created, and loving the people around us.

For it is only then that we can truly and honestly participate in the Blessed Sacrament of Holy Communion.