

We have just returned from our annual family trip to the lake in Maine where we have been going for 41 years. And most years Carol and I spend a few days wending our way north before we meet the kids for the week in the cabin. Usually, but not this year, that journey includes a few days in Boston. Last year as we were walking around the city we came across a church that had a huge banner strung between two pillars out front, and on it words from our first lesson this morning. It said, "*My House Shall Be Called A House of Prayer For All Peoples.*" Neat huh? And now I kid you not...directly across the front door there was a chain and hanging on the chain a sign that said, "*Trespassers Will Be Arrested And Prosecuted.*" The Church can certainly give confusing messages. We can give lip service to the Gospel and then what we do often sends a completely different message.

Our lessons today are very simply about God's call for inclusivity for the community of faith, for God's people, accompanied by the reminder that God's grace and promises are permanent. And that is a lesson and a Gospel that we need to be constantly working at.

I want to share a quick overview of our Lutheran Church during my time.

As many of you know neither Carol's parents nor mine ever went to church and so we were blessed that a little church in Camden had an outreach to their community. My sister, brother and I wandered in as young kids, and we were welcomed. And we grew there. I found out years later that some of the elders in that old German parish weren't sure Scottish people could be Lutheran. Honest. It was good because it opened a conversation that led that parish to become the first integrated ULCA parish in New Jersey. And a model for how inclusive ministry could be done.

When I went to Seminary there was just one woman in my class and she was studying to be a lay associate. It is hard to believe that it has been only a little more than 40 years that women could be ordained in the ELCA and our predecessor bodies. Can you imagine going and telling Vicar Jane with all of her talents, all of her commitment, all of her vision, that because of her gender she wasn't acceptable as a Pastor. What a loss that would be.

Towards the end of my Seminary days, one, actually a few of my classmates were taken aside and told that they wouldn't be ordained...because they were gay. It took forty years but 2 years ago this month the ELCA finally acted for the full inclusivity of Christ's church. An action that was adopted two weeks ago by the Lutheran Church in Canada.

I think it's our insecurity, our fear, the horrible things so many of us were taught as children that often has us drawing those lines and deciding who's in and who's out. In a moment, in that encounter with that foreign woman, Jesus changed everything. Easter and all of its promise and all of its new life is for everyone. And there is a definition of the church. And there is a description of our mission.