

CRIBB<S>NOTE – APRIL 26, 2009

CHURCH IS NOT FOR EVERYBODY! Church is not simply a place with walls and sacred space. It is a gathering of community where the people of God find common place. At its best, church is whenever the hearts, minds, and souls of righteous and just folk congregate for the single purpose of affirming God's pre-Edenic intention for the world. But, it is not for everybody. God's pre-Edenic intentionality is that which the Creator designed before the beginning of the worlds as paradise for habitation and proper relationships and Covenant. It is what the Bible declares as "good" in God's eyes when Creation itself was under review.

Everyone is invited to be the church. Nobody is rejected or disqualified to share in the community of believers. More importantly, the very precept of church requires new language and understanding of what it means to exist as the gathered community.

The United Church of Christ recently adopted a slogan that has been used for marketing and branding purposes to promote another new approach to express how we explain the meaning of church.

We say, "God is still speaking." Those words provide an image of an active and engaged Creator who continues to say something to us in our time. We have another mantra, "No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here." That pronounces an invitation to experience 'radical hospitality' without condition. Both statements are used to identify the United Church of Christ as a community that is open to receive the contemporary Word of God and to extend a welcoming call to all people who are seeking to find and know God in their lives. This is very wonderful in so many surprising and unexpected ways, but do we really agree and believe what we are saying?

Are we convinced God speaks to us now? Do we know how to listen to God as we often rush through life attending to the daily real and fabricated emergencies that occupy our time? Is God still speaking to you?

Do we really want everyone to enter this community of faith and join us? Can we accept all people without condition? What does that mean? Do we reflect the great diversity of humanity that is closely resident to us when we come together in worship? Are we ready for persons who respond to such an unbelievable statement, "No matter who you are or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here?"

I read a bumper sticker on the back of a car parked in front of me outside the Chicago Theological Seminary this week that said, "God is too big to fit in only one religion."

Wow! Right on! Yes!

If that is true, then, God is much more than the Church. The Church is too small to cradle exclusively the body of Christ. God speaks to all people in all places at all times. God speaks in the languages that everybody understands exactly what God intends for us as human beings. There is no barrier that can separate anyone from God's amazing love and grace. So, the Church is only one community available for people to connect with the Creator. Church is not for everybody.

There are synagogues, temples, mosques, cathedrals, shrines, open spaces, and sacred sites where people of faith come together to honor The One who makes all things possible. There is a great and varied array of traditions, rituals, expressions, liturgies,

periods of silence and opportunities for exhilarating jubilation that allow people to be in communion and community as bodies of faithful believers. There is so much we can never know or understand about the Mystery that is God.

We are invited and welcomed to enter into a realm of remarkable divine connections. We are given the incredible gift of human kindness that binds us together just the way God intended before time, space, or creation. During this season of Easter, we are reminded again of how much God loves and offers us sacred texts to renew our souls and revive us again. Will you accept this precious gift of life? Do you want to explore some of the ways God manifests divine oneness among us?

Today is a good time to consider practical application of our faith so others will know Christ is among us.