

It is a hot mid-noon moment, and I am sitting beneath the canopy of the Moore Place lobby. One woman sitting across from me - I have yet to learn her name - is smoking and her gaze is low, onto the warming concrete. Her friend, Kay, is reading prayers from a book of Alcoholics Anonymous literature. To begin conversation, I ask the first woman about her favorite piece of scripture. She pauses. Looks me into the eyes, and recites Psalm 23. She speaks about the Lord guiding her for the years she spent sleeping on concrete under a streetlight. She trusted no one, but she asked God to help her memorize Psalm 23 as a form of protection. When she was afraid, she would pray to herself, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul." I didn't know how to hold together her words about green pastures when the places she laid down in were overcrowded shelters, streets where women face the continual threat of burglary or sexual violence, or prison cells. Yet the cells of her eyes showed a deep courage as she gazed from across the patio into my soul. "Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

If the house of the Lord at all resembles Moore Place, there is an eclectic group of characters. The vision of Moore Place is to provide housing for the most vulnerable of those on the margins of our society - men and women who have been chronically homeless and also have one, or often more, disabling conditions. We have folks who identify as mothers, ex-cons, active users, addicts in recovery, believers, veterans - often holding many of these identities at once. The radical hospitality of Moore Place has exemplified to me that welcoming the homeless into homes is an act of subversion, and takes great courage. When the project began as a small pilot, no one knew if it would work just to give people an apartment and wrap-around support and expect their lives to turn around. But we have found, through the years, that the housing-first model does present a higher rate of retention than any other, saves tax payer dollars, and makes ending homelessness a realizable goal.

Growing up in American society, especially learning from my North Carolinian grandmother, I was taught that hospitality means making another comfortable in your home by offering baked goods, sweet tea, and a comfortable seat. You welcome others until they believe that the space is also their own. Like any human culture, there are also social borders to hospitality. You are welcome to be part of our housing the homeless project if we think we can turn you into a success story - in other words, if we think you can become self sufficient, independent and hard working. You are welcome to join the family of American citizens if you speak the right language, have powerful connections, and enter with the proper documentation. And you are welcome to a hot meal in our churches if you first come to the sermon, say amen, and then let the middle-class families serve you some chicken and dumplings.

What if we give up our Americanized visions of hospitality, and let our visions be based upon Jesus' vision of the Kingdom? What does hospitality in God's house look like? On the door of one tenant's apartment there lives a sign, "Welcome: all who enter here, this is the house of the Lord." The owner of the home, Mark is a handsome, around fifty-year old guy with tanned skin and some stunning dark brown eyes. I first met Mark on a visit with his pastor from Covenant Pres, where he started attending when he was still living in a nearby homeless camp. During the visit, I learned that Mark is dying of psoriasis. He has been trying to work with hospice nurses to adjust his medications but he is in pain most hours of the day. As we entered his home, decorated with pictures of Alaskan wildlife on the walls, he welcomed us onto his sofa and he laid down on the bed. "I'm in too much pain to sit up," he said, and proceeded to tell us about his disabling condition and how much he'd like to get back to writing devotionals. In the midst of that conversation, I felt God's love enter into the room. I sunk more deeply into the sofa cushions. The vulnerability with which Mark shared his struggles with us was the best gift of hospitality he could have offered us. His trust allowed us to enter his world, even for a moment, and feel God's presence there. It felt, in a simple phrase, like uninhibited love. He needed not offer any formalities to overcome the barriers between us. From what I have witnessed, Mark lives with his heart more oxygenated and open than most human beings. "I have no time to filter myself anymore, because I'm dying," he said with laughter. In that tension of approaching death, Mark shared with me his belief in heaven and hell – knowing the death that he has experienced on the streets, he knows the depths of human evil. He also believes in a God who welcomes us home. He showed me that the house of the Lord is an open place where human pain and joys are woven together, and there is no burden too difficult for the community to carry.

The house of God, from the glimpses I have enjoyed at Moore Place, is definitely wheelchair accessible. It doesn't always smell pleasantly. In the words of Priest Gregory Boyle, church sanctuaries that give refuge to the homeless can smell like *pecueca*, foot odor, because that is our *compromiso*, our commitment. This place of commitment at Moore Place is filled with eclectic characters and decorated with puzzles put together by residents - and it is a place that swallows you. The love knocks on the door of your spirit until you answer with your arms flung open to receive some real, unpredictable conversation. Once you meet women who recite Psalm 23 and men who share stories from prison and jokes and prayers all in the same breath, you cannot help but want to make a home with them, un hogar, which in Spanish translates to "the place where the fire burns." The place where the fire of the Spirit's love overwhelms and fills the cracks of the world's brokenness. The question, as followers of Christ, is whether we have the courage to enter and move in.

Holy God of all tenderness and mercy, God who sustains us and walks beside us always, el Dios que camina con nosotros por todo el viaje,

We thank you this day for the gift of life – for the very breath within our breath in which we encounter your spirit sustaining us. We thank you for the bread of the earth that nourishes our bodies and for the water that forms our cells. We thank you that our bodies together form a community, este cuerpo de peregrinos – we, a body of pilgrims, thank you for the ability to walk in this world together, to learn from and delight in the gifts of each individual gathered here. We are grateful for each hour that we spend together in worship and experience the loving compassion of Christ through the eyes of the other.

We ask you, merciful Creator, that each hour, we might become better reflections of your desire for love shared all members of the community of life. We ask that we might seek harmony that you have implanted in our heartstrings, that we may be hospitable to the diversity of instruments through which you sing. We pray to listen to the voices of all gathered here and to all who are not present with us, to those who may feel excluded in these walls, that we might listen for each person's wisdom and offer dignity to each opinion. We ask for your guidance in healing our inner and outer divisions.

God, we seek to be a body in communion with you and with one another, a body that offers hope for Jesus' vision of the Kingdom. Help us to be bread that is broken open to let all enter, so that we may share the joys and trials of life together. We pray for all those who may feel they are alone, for those who are in the midst of the isolating battle with addiction. We pray for those who have not received hospitality in overcrowded shelters, and for those who are alone on the streets. We pray for our neighbors who are pilgrims to this nation and have been discriminated against por su lengua nativa, por el color de su piel, and who have left family members in their home places. We pray for our brothers and sisters globally who are persecuted for their faith, and who have been forgotten

by us and others. We ask that our body might reflect a hospitality which breaks these borders and offers unconditional grace among and between us.

Gracias, Dios, por ser la pan y el agua de vida, we thank you for being the one who sustains us, ignites the fire of our souls and lifts us toward your very heart. We close in prayer remembering the words that you shared with us to pray, saying together,

*The Lord's prayer*

Amen.