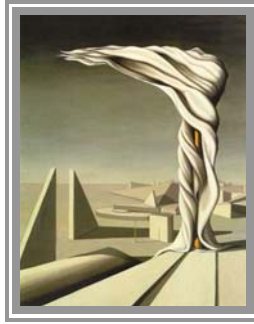


I HAVE SEEN THREE CITIES



CAPERNAUM – THE PLACE I CAME FROM

BETHSAIDA – THE PLACE I AM GOING

KORAZIN – THE PLACE I MUST AVOID

Scripture:

Mark 9

Capernaum

30. They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were,
31. because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be betrayed into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise."
32. But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.
33. They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?"
34. But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.
35. Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."
36. He took a little child and had him stand among them. Taking him in his arms, he said to them,
37. "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."

Luke 9

Bethsaida

10. When the apostles returned, they reported to Jesus what they had done. Then he took them with him and they withdrew by themselves to a town called Bethsaida,
11. but the crowds learned about it and followed him. He welcomed them and spoke to them about the kingdom of God, and healed those who needed healing.

Matthew 11

Woe to you Korazin

20. Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent.
21. "Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes.



ALONG THE SHORES OF GALILEE

The picture on the front of the bulletin is one I took last summer on the northern shore of the Sea of Galilee looking south. If the Sea of Galilee were the face of the clock, this would be taken from about eleven o'clock, and the gap that you see in the mountains would be at about eight o'clock. The gap is where the main highway leaves the lakeshore and

heads westward toward Nazareth, Medigo and the Mediterranean coastline. Between that notch and the place where I was standing to take this picture, most of Jesus' ministry took place. Not a very big area, is it.

This is the Sea where he calmed the water, this is the place where he fed the 5,000, this is the place

where he preached the sermon on the mount, and this is the place where he preached in the synagogue. This is the region to which Jesus moved when he left his childhood home of Nazareth.

JESUS MOVED TO CAPERNAUM

So why did Jesus move here from Nazareth? Kids who head off to college know part of the reason: "Prophets are not without honor, except in their own country and in their own house." (Matthew 13:57)

But there were other reasons too. The execution of John the Baptist by the Tetrarch Herod Antipas (the Fox) was a much more powerful reason to leave the heartland and to go to the periphery. John the Baptist was executed for denouncing Herod Antipas for marrying his brother's ex-wife. Jesus, who was baptized by John, feared that he might be the next to pay for challenging the authorities, and fled east to the Sea of Galilee .

THE EVANGELICAL TRIANGLE

Three cities on the Sea of Galilee form what is called "the evangelical triangle." We have a brief scripture about each of them in the lessons for today. They are: Capernaum, Bethsaida and Korazin. The works that Jesus performed in the evangelical triangle laid the foundation of his ministry. What he did first and what last, where he went first, and where next, we will never know. But we may be able to find out how these places may have looked, and I think they represent cities that each of us has visited in our own lives.

CAPERNAUM

During his years of ministry, Jesus made his home among the Jewish fishermen in Capernaum. Capernaum was on the main highway; it was a regional government center, it had military guards, it had a synagogue that was a religious and educational center, it had a trade industry and a fishing industry, and a number of homes built of rock along the water's edge. Peter's mother's home has been identified here, and it has been persevered as a place Jesus stayed when Peter's mother was ill. It was in Capernaum that the disciples learned that Jesus would be rejected, betrayed, and would suffer. And it was here that the disciples asked which of them would be the greatest. It was the wrong question. But Jesus answered with one of his greatest challenges: "If anyone wants to be first, he

must be the very last, and the servant of all." And he took a little Capernaum child, and lifted him up and challenged them to have the humility of this child in serving God. Capernaum was the home that Jesus chose.

BETHSAIDA

Bethsaida was the largest of the three cities and was unearthed a few miles up the road near the entry of one of the three freshwater streams that flow into the Sea of Galilee. This was good fishing. And this is the place where Jesus called at least four of his disciples and said he would make them fishers of humans, not catfish.

Bethsaida was under the jurisdiction of Philip Herod the brother of Herod Antipas. According to the testimony of Josephus, Philip Herod was different from his brother and much more beloved by his subjects. In case of adversity, Jesus could find refuge at Bethsaida, and it seems that he made quite good use of this possibility. Bethsaida became prosperous and eventually its name was changed to Julia to honor the daughter of Caesar.

A few houses, typical of rural courtyard houses, have been excavated thus far. When I walked among them, I found kitchens, open-air courtyards, a wine cellar, and shops along the main street that were being restored. In areas such as Galilee where most of the year the skies are blue and cloudless, a big part of family life took place in the courtyard. It was the place where the family would convene for activities such as work, fixing and mending fishing gear, processing and preparing all kinds of food and meeting with friends and family to discuss various issues of concern: political, religious and economic.

Bethsaida was the place Jesus went to. He drew disciples from its citizens, he did some business there, he preached nearby, and he brought calm to the fishing waters near the estuaries. It's like places that we go to for business, or to see friends, or to seek recreation. There is an international bird flyway overhead, and feeding ponds, and sanctuaries around it. Where do you go for business or recreation, and why do you go there? How is the culture of the places you visit different from the place in which you live?

KORAZIN

Unlike Capernaum and Bethsaida, Korazin is not located near the seashore. It is an hour's walk uphill from the lake toward the slopes that descend to the Sea of Galilee from the basalt plateau known

today as the Korazin Plateau. It is hotter on the hillside, and the rock looked to me like volcanic rock. Not much grows there, and the search for water must have been constant. Maybe it was a bedroom community, or a backroom community that people visited for secret reasons.

The inhabitants probably also gleaned a living serving passengers and itinerant merchants on the roads leading from the Mediterranean coast to the Golan Heights. Unlike Capernaum and Bethsaida, first century Korazin was never excavated. The city walls of the ancient town were still seen and make it look like a fortified village. Why did it need to be fortified?

Centuries after Jesus, very little was done to improve their standard of living. New settlers came to Bethsaida and to other places in Galilee and developed merchandise such as wine, olive oil, linen and dried fresh-water fish. Jesus cursed Korazin, and said that the people had been reluctant to believe. Maybe they didn't want to change their ways; maybe they had something to hide.

A CURSED CITY

I wonder if there is any city that Jesus would curse today. There are probably some people in Lynchburg, Virginia that would curse a city near us, but we might feel the same way about them. It's not the city, of course, once again it is the culture. It is what is permitted, and what people fear. Today I fear excessive regulation more than excessive freedom. The cities that I avoid are places where one culture is lifted up, while another culture is put down. What cities would you avoid? What cultures frighten you? What is the edge of your toleration? I can think of some zip codes that fit in that category.

THE THEATER IN WHICH JESUS TAUGHT

Jesus taught and healed the sick and preached to his audience and disciples about the Kingdom of Heaven in all three of these cities. He told his poor and humble fishermen that success and wealth in this world do not mean the same thing in the next life. He explained that there is reward in righteous living and that if it does not come in this world, it will surely come in the Kingdom of Heaven.

In another episode a Roman military commander (a centurion), who dwelt in the village, approached him. The centurion asked him to heal a boy who was lying sick at his home. The centurion knew that Jesus would not go to his home to heal the child because a Halakhah (Jewish law), decreed

by the Rabbis, forbade Jews to enter gentiles' homes. Jesus was thrilled by the centurion's faith because he did not find such faith among his Jewish fellowmen.

"Go home," he said, "and the boy will be healed."

Jesus drew his disciples from these cities. (Simon-Petrus, the fisherman, and his brother Andrew were from Bethsaida. Jesus told them to stop being fishers of fish and become fishers of men. Philip, another disciple, was from Bethsaida as well. Two more fishermen, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, the wealthy fisherman who hired workers to fish for him, probably also came from this town.) In addition to healing individuals, Jesus performed miracles to the multitude. On a plain not far from Bethsaida, he was followed by a crowd of 5,000 people and when there was nothing for the crowd to eat, Jesus managed to feed the crowd with just two fish and five loaves of bread. (This is traditionally referred to as the Miracle of the Multiplication of Loaves and Fishes. – Matthew 14:13-21)

THREE CITIES

**So Capernaum was the city where Jesus lived.
Bethsaida was a city to which Jesus traveled.
Korazin was a city Jesus told people to avoid.**

Together they provide us with a definition of culture that we can translate into our own experience. So what would you say to me if I asked you...

- Where are you from?
- Where are you going?
- What do you avoid?

CULTURE

Cultures are what make countries unique. Not everyone agrees on the meaning or definition of culture. To some, it means the outlook or opinion of an entire society that can be reflected in their language, literature, religion, music, dress, cooking, etc. Some societies are culturally very rich. Culture can also vary within a region, society or sub-group. For example, a workplace may have a specific culture that sets it apart from similar workplaces. A family may have a specific set of values, morals or beliefs that differ from other families of the same ethnic background.

Culture is more than just material goods -- that is the things the culture uses and produces. Culture is also the beliefs and values of the people in that culture.

BORN

So the culture into which you were born does not have to be the culture in which you make your home. That is a freedom we cherish.

GOING

Where you are going defines your goals; the life, the family, the friends that you would select for yourself. What would you like to do on a free day? What makes you happy? What nourishes your soul.

Where does your business take you.

We always have choices. Even doing nothing is a choice, and if we choose to do nothing about the way in which we live, then that is still the choice we have to live with.

AVOIDING

And what city do you avoid? We are not at home in every culture. But Jesus didn't let it go at that.

- Do you avoid places that are unhealthy? Food? Habits that are unhealthy?
- Do you avoid people who take you in directions that you should not go.
- Do you avoid people who disagree with you – not a good idea.
- Do you avoid crowds, or seek them out?

Jesus said, "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you." - Matthew 5:43-44 NKJV

HOW CAN YOU LOVE SOMEONE WHO IS DIFFERENT THAN YOU ARE?

The first step is to recognize that all people are created in God's image. God values every person. It's just that we come from different cities. But that doesn't make us enemies.

Then try to understand why this person is an enemy. Perhaps he or she is being malicious, or simply misdirected. Could it be you did something to cause hurt? Seek to know what drives the wedge between you. If it is within your power, do all you can to remove that wedge.

Look for common ground. Enemies are usually formed out of a disagreement in one particular area of life. Put aside that issue for a moment and look for things you can agree on. Focus on these areas in your relationship.

Consider distancing yourself. If there is no reason to be in a relationship with this person, stay away from situations that could be troublesome. Love from a distance is easier than love in the middle of confrontation.

Pray for this person and for wisdom to know how to relate to him or her. Only with a measure of God's love is it possible to love your enemies. God's love can look beyond the hurtful actions and into the possibilities of the heart. It can fill in the gaps in your own ability to love.

I HAVE BEEN TO THREE CITIES, AND SO HAVE YOU.

The city in which you make your home.

The city where you go for business or leisure.

And the city you must avoid, but must not hate.

And we can learn something from each one of them.

- No culture can live if it attempts to be exclusive. (Gandhi)
- People who know nothing of foreign cultures, know nothing of their own. (Goethe, adapted)
- I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides, and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any. (Gandhi)
- Why is it that one culture is more comfortable seeing two men holding guns than holding hands? (Ernest Gaines)
- Life is plurality, death is uniformity.
- If we are to achieve a richer culture, rich in contrasting values, we must recognize the whole gamut of human potentialities, and so weave a less arbitrary social fabric, one in which each diverse gift will find a fitting place. (Margaret Mead)



Dr. John H. Cushman
Presbyterian Church of the Roses
2500 Patio Court
Santa Rosa, CA 95405
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