

1 Corinthians 1: 10-18
Matthew 4: 12-23
January 22, 2017
Hamilton Union Presbyterian Church

In all the potent phrases that appear in today's scriptures one stands out to me. It is this: "...and made his home in Capernaum by the sea." The larger context is this:

Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left his home in Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali.

Instead of "made his home", the more economical King James Version renders the Greek word, "dwelt." The phrase is important. It speaks of the deep distinction between living at an address and making a home where we live. It speaks of the desire to invest our whole being in where we live, to dare to put down roots without regard to however long we may expect to remain in a given place.

It is interesting that Matthew speaks of Jesus making his home in Capernaum. After all, as far as we know, Jesus *had no home*. That is, he had no house—no private residence. When I visited the ruins of Capernaum on the shore of the Sea of Galilee it was believed that Peter had given Jesus a room in his house. Jesus himself said, "Foxes have holes and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head." (Mt. 8:20) It is clear, then, that "making a home" is not necessarily related to having a place to live.

What might it mean to dwell in a place without necessarily having a permanent residence? Let me suggest a few thoughts:

First, to dwell or make a home somewhere is to live in the present. Jesus never gives the impression that he wishes he was somewhere else. The most important place in the world for

Jesus is where he happens to be. The most important people to Jesus are the ones with whom he is. To be in the presence of Jesus is to feel his complete attention.

Now it is the case that not everyone wants Jesus' complete attention. To allow someone to give us their complete attention is risky. We must be open and honest. If there are things we wish to hide we shy away from someone's complete attention. Jesus will discover this over and over again. It is why it is mainly the poor, sick and outcast seek him out. Those who have no *home* in this world who find a place in the presence of Jesus.

I wonder if what is called God's preferential attitude toward the poor doesn't misunderstand what Jesus is about. Instead of God preferring one group of people over another—for instance, the poor over the rich; might it be more the case that only those who recognize their homelessness in this world and who seek their place in the presence actually receive the peace he gives. Could this be the meaning Jesus has in mind when he teaches in the Beatitudes, "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of God"? (Mt 5:3)

If Jesus is truly and completely present wherever he is, then this kingdom of which he speaks is a very present reality. We do not so much enter it as receive it. The price of admission to the kingdom is admitting that we have no abiding place in this world. All our attempts to be successful, to be secure and to fit in the society and economic culture will never give us true peace. That is why Jesus teaches us to seek his peace that the world cannot give. It is why he teaches us to seek first God's kingdom and righteousness and everything else will fall into place. Because Jesus fully invests his whole life into each moment of each day his presence is not somewhere over the rainbow. It is right here and right now. It is a lifelong spiritual journey to right-size ourselves and our priorities to receive this sense of utter belonging.

Yet another implication of Jesus' making his home in Capernaum is this: he is joining his life to that of a community. Many people scratch their heads over how it is that Jesus walks along the shore and says to some fishermen, "Follow me and I will make you fishers for people," and they drop their nets and follow him! To be sure there are accounts which suggest that Jesus was a total stranger; yet before Jesus calls the fishermen he has already *made his home in Capernaum*. To me the implication is clear. Jesus was known, not only to the fishermen, but to the town as a whole. It is possible to be part of a community and never leave a mark. It is possible to be invisible. It is possible not only to make no mark on a community but to be untouched by that community.

This is the corollary to avoiding the full attention of Jesus. We find it hard to make ourselves known to a community. We fear criticism and rejection. So we do not dwell in the community. We have an address there but we do not know anybody and nobody knows us. yet when we make our home in a community we throw our lot in with that community. We seek the good of that community. We offer our gifts. We get to know people. We find a way to make the community a better place. Over time we not only get to know people but as important, we *become known*. People recognize us. In big ways and small we form relationships. We find ourselves involved and caring about what happens in our community and among its residents. We are less interested in what the community owes us than what we can contribute.

Of course truly dwelling in a community means living among people who upset and offend us. It means rubbing shoulders with people whose views are in our judgement totally bizarre. And when we truly dwell in a community we discover that there are people who believe the same things about us. Yet when people make their home in a particular community

we discover that the very person we find so challenging holds the same commitment to the common good as we do. We find ourselves serving side by side and caring about them and their families and their aspirations. We find that they care about us.

The conflicts referred to by the apostle Paul reflect the loss of such community. Much like in our society, where we are isolated into tribes of mutual agreement and hostile to others, in Corinth there were Chloe's people, Paul's people, Apollos' people and even a party of Christ! The rest of Paul's letter is a passionate attempt to restore the Corinthian community as one dwelling in Christ alone.

Real change only happens when we invest deeply in relationships. It is then that we can earn the trust of another. Real growth in faith, hope, love and justice is the fruit of patient living in community. It is the fruit of listening, caring and putting the concerns of others along side⁴ of our own.

As Christians we know that such community can never be imposed by edict. It is an invitation that comes to us from God through Jesus. It is the yeast in the dough. It is the mustard seed. It is that which grows from within us and among us. It comes from the One who makes his home with us. Amen.