

3A SFX 2023

He went and settled in Capernaum

If you go to the Holy Land today, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee a large sign says "Capernaum the town of Jesus." It is an archaeological site in the care of the Franciscans.

You can see a modern church that looks a bit like a spaceship, or a giant spider hovering over the earth below, and a few bits of brick which is what most ruins look like to me without a guide to bring them to life.

It is a church on stilts because it shelters below the ruins of an octagonal 5th century basilica, but under that they discovered Christian house-church going back to the 5th Century. But even lower that they have identified a place that was the focus of veneration from as early as the mid-1st century, the time of the apostles. They identify it as the house of Peter.

Isn't that amazing how archaeology can help touch the historical Jesus, the incarnate Lord. We can pause before Peter's house. The place where Jesus perhaps stayed, where he healed Peter's mother-in-law, where crowds gathered at the doorway clamouring for a sight of this healer and miracle worker. Peter's mother got up and prepared a meal. We can imagine quite hungry mouths to feed on fresh fish Peter, Andrew, James, and John.

There are a number of images in today's Gospel: Jesus preaching and teaching, Jesus curing disease and sickness, Jesus calling two pairs of brothers. But what strikes me is that it is this small little village, in the back of beyond – Galilee like Herefordshire was borderlands – this small village was the locus of Jesus' activity – his hometown.

The Temple in Jerusalem may have been his Father's House, but Galilee was his earthly home. Jesus in his life and ministry showed a preference for the domestic. He seems to say that God is not to be found in a great city and amongst the elites, but the Kingdom of Heaven is amongst us, is close at hand, in our homes and in our workplaces where the disciples today are called.

In the Gospels Jesus seemed happiest in the homes and in the streets of Galilee, more at ease, more himself, without the tension that Jerusalem brings. It was not Jerusalem but Galilee that he chose to live and work amongst his people: as a carpenter, as a teacher, a rabbi, as a healer and prophet. Teaching us to touch Heaven as we go about our daily rounds on earth. In such ways did he spend his days before his climactic death in Jerusalem.

And when he came to teach, when he comes to show us what discipleship is like, he used parables of ordinary people like you and me, going about their lives, buying and selling in the street, baking in the home, cultivating in the field. A world of neighbour-hood parties and domestic chores, of families packed into their rooms at night, trying to sleep at night. A world of day labourers, tyrannical bosses and dodgy dealings, desperate widows, the hungry in the doorways and a lack of justice.

There, in this world of the ordinary he reveals the nature of the Kingdom. It is like finding something we thought lost there at the back of the sofa – or at least like the woman sweeping the floor, finding a penny and calling a party. Creating the sort of contagious joy that infects

the neighbours. It is like a shrub in your back garden that becomes an unexpectedly beautiful tree where the birds come to nest.

This Kingdom that reveals itself in our relationships around the table. Not perfect. But it is where we connect. Think of Jesus in the house of Martha and Mary, their friend and guest. Think of the guest at the wedding feast at Cana who saved the day and lifted gathering of with the Galilean equivalent of Chateauneuf de Pape.

God comes to us disguised as life, says the writer Philp Yancey. There he is in the midst of things. Not waiting for the family to be perfect before putting his foot through the door. He just goes in. He moves amongst us, in our joys and tears, hopes and fears.

There, at the centre of life he shows us that we can find intimations of the Kingdom. When a justice is put right, where a kiss is given, where generous measure of wine is poured and feast laid on the table. Where a quiet prayer is said and hope given birth. Where daily bread is broken, and forgiveness is given.

“Our homeland is in heaven” said St Paul to the Philippians, but isn’t it also true that our heaven is to be found at home? The Kingdom of God is amongst us. Salvation happening in the routines and repetitive rhythms of the everyday. The Kingdom revealed.

In the second half of my life, coming here as parish priest I have had to discover the domestic in a different way to the more organized life of the monastery. Finding God not just in the people who knock on the door, not just in this Church, but in a quiet prayer doing the washing-up or the ironing, “*God amongst the pots and pans*” as St Theresa or Avila puts it.

I think of Brother Lawrence, who described himself as an awkward man who broke everything. He wrote a little book called “*The Practice of the Presence of God*” and found the Almighty in the Kitchen. “We can do little things for God” he said. “I turn the cake that is frying on the pan for love of him.” “In the noise and clutter of my kitchen...I possess God in as great tranquility as if I were upon my knees at the Blessed Sacrament.”

“*The normal must become holy, and holiness must become normal*” said St Pope John Paul. Let’s not think that God is somewhere else, but revealing himself in the daily round. The God who made his home in Capernaum of Galilee wants to find a place in our homes too.