

Streetsville United Church  
Sunday, Jan 23, 2011  
Rev. John Tapscott

**"A PLACE TO CALL HOME"**

Matthew 4:13 -23

We live in a mobile society. People rarely spend their whole lives in one location. We certainly experience this movement in our own congregation. People come and go so often we sometimes have trouble keeping our address file up-to-date. In my own life I have had 5 permanent addresses, and that's not counting the time I was at university or worked at short-term summer jobs. Many years ago, clergy moved from one church to another far more frequently than they do today. In fact, before the United Church of Canada came into being, Methodist clergy had to move to a different church every 4 years. I have spoken to some elderly folk whose fathers were Methodist ministers and they said that it wasn't so bad, really. One thing they remember is that the family never fully unpacked their boxes since they'd soon be moving again. Presbyterian ministers however, had no time limit; they could stay their whole ministry in one location. And a few did. There was one legendary Presbyterian minister on Cape Breton Island who stayed at a church for over forty years. When the United Church was formed in 1925, the Presbyterian model was chosen for clergy, which is why I've been here going on eleven years. Some people have let me know that they prefer the old Methodist model.

Back in Jesus' time, people did not move so frequently, of course. People often spent their whole life in the same town or city. However, people still did move, for one reason or another. Jesus himself moved to several places during his life. Joseph and Mary lived in Nazareth, but had to go to Bethlehem for the census. And that is where Jesus was born. At God's instruction Joseph and Mary fled Herod's murderous intentions and lived safely in Egypt for some time. After Herod died, the family moved back to Israel and settled in Nazareth where Jesus grew up and spent his early adult years. It seems that for a time he lived in Judea, near the Jordan River. John the Baptist and Jesus didn't work together, but they did similar work, baptizing people to prepare them for the coming

Kingdom of God. And we read in Matthew 4 that when Jesus heard that John had been arrested and thrown into jail by Herod, he withdrew back to Galilee, presumably to avoid a similar fate, at least for the time being. Jesus came back to Nazareth but left there, perhaps because he was not well-received by his hometown folk. Matthew writes, "He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea." (4:13) For three years Jesus called Capernaum his home. That was the center of his ministry activities. That's where he lived.

God desires that all people have a place to call home. God desires that everyone have a place to live in, a place of safety and security. Homelessness, or lack of shelter is not God's will. It is very sad when we hear of someone having "no fixed address", for whatever reason. Now we don't all need \$27 million dollar mansions like those on the Bridlepath in Toronto. Even if I had that kind of money, a house like that would be nothing but a burden to me. I'm very content with the house I have and very thankful for it - warm, comfortable and dry. What more does one need? Well, not much really. What we can say is that all people need adequate, if not fancy, shelter. And so God calls Christians to make homes not only for ourselves and our families, but also for those who have no home, or those who cannot afford decent housing. That's why Christians are involved in projects like "Habitat for Humanity" or the Pathway Housing Projects, or at shelters for the homeless, or in helping to bring a bit of cheer to the residents at Streetsville House just around the corner. Christian churches are often involved in building or providing space for affordable housing and seniors housing, often right on their church property. All these things are God-ordained ministries. Remember that before he entered his public ministry Jesus worked as a carpenter. We don't know exactly what he did or built, but he may well have been involved in building or fixing peoples' homes.

"Jesus left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea." Matthew saw Jesus' home in Capernaum as fulfilling Scripture, "Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles, the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned." Jesus brings light wherever he makes his home. He said, "I am the light of the world, whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but have the light of life."

Now the day would come when Jesus had no place to call home. In obedience to his Heavenly Father he left Capernaum and made his way towards Jerusalem to give himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. Jesus told someone who wanted to follow him, "Foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head." Along the way he found temporary lodging in places like the home of Martha and Mary, but basically he was homeless. Jesus willingly gave up his earthly home in order to gain for us a heavenly home by his own sinless life, atoning death and resurrection victory. He says to us, "Believe in God; believe also in me; in my Father's house are many dwelling places; I go to prepare a place for you."

The Book of Revelation tells us that one day Christ will come again openly and there will be a new heaven and a new earth. The holy city, the new Jerusalem will come down out of heaven and "Behold, the dwelling of God will be among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them." That is what is to come. But even now the Risen Lord Jesus is seeking to make his home in our homes, and in our hearts, in our church, in our community, in our world. Christ is seeking to shine in us and among us as did in Capernaum. May He always be welcome among us.