

Galilee of the Nations

January 27, 2008

(Epiphany 3 - Year A)

Matthew 4: 12-23

St. Alban's Episcopal Church, Waco, Texas

My best friend when I was a little kid was a boy named Walter Black. Walter lived just one block behind me.

And when Walter and I were probably in first grade, we decided one Saturday that we would make a lemonade stand and set it up at the end of our block.

From each of our mothers, we bought dixie cups and lemonade mix, to set up shop.

We took a card table and set it up at the corner of Perthshire Street and Plantation Road.

We put out a homemade sign and we mixed up our lemonade.

If I remember correctly, we offered lemonade for 5 cents a glass.

Then, we sat at our lemonade stand, waiting for customers to drive by.

Now, we decided to set up our lemonade stand on Plantation Road, which was the road that cut right through the middle of our neighborhood.

To the east was Bunker Hill Elementary School, that had sports fields, with kids going to and from baseball practice.

To the south was the Memorial Forest Club, where I swam in the summer and took tennis lessons.

To the north was Memorial City Mall, which is where my brother and I would hang out, buying records for 99 cents a piece at our favorite store in the mall, called Record Town.

In the universe in which Walter Black and I lived in the early 1970s, we had set up our lemonade stand on Plantation Road, at the crossroads of the world.

And the world, as we knew it, stopped by to purchase a 5 cent lemonade from us at our little lemonade stand.

If I remember correctly, Walter and I turned a small profit from our first lemonade stand.

And we made a profit, because we set up our stand at the crossroads of the world, spreading the gospel of pink lemonade, from the Galilee of the nations.

Jesus was even more masterful in setting up *his* lemonade stand, in spreading his gospel of healing.

According to the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus begins his ministry by going up north, up north to Galilee.

Jesus makes his home in Capernaum, on the shores of the Sea of Galilee, home of Peter and Andrew and James and John.

When Jesus sets up shop in Galilee, this is in accordance with the Old Testament prophet Isaiah, who spoke of the light shining in the deep darkness, a light which will come from Galilee.

Using one of the most beautiful phrases in Scripture, Isaiah says:

“In the latter time, he will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.”

Galilee of the nations - what a wonderful description of the place where Jesus chose to begin his ministry of proclamation and healing.

For Galilee was way up north, way up north from Jerusalem, way up north from the Temple, the Temple that was the center of Jewish life.

And Galilee was the crossroads of the world.

To the west, was the Mediterranean Sea, with boats and soldiers and people coming from Rome.

To the east, was the Orient, with pungent spices and religions and people from the far East.

To the south, was Judea, with the strange Jewish people who worshiped only one God.

You see, Jesus was no backwater, redneck country boy.

Jesus chose to begin his ministry in the middle of cosmopolitan Galilee, where his message would be seen and heard, not just by Jews,

but also by Greeks and Romans and Arabs.
For he has made glorious the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations.

One of my favorite things to do, is to get away from St. Alban's sometimes, away from the religious trappings of this temple, and to visit you in your Galilee, in your land beyond the Jordan.

When I was serving in Houston at St. Mary's Episcopal Church, The Woodlands, which is a master-planned community of homes and office buildings, was located close to that church.

One of the men at St. Mary's, a man named Warner, worked at a shipping company, with offices in The Woodlands.

Warner and I would go to lunch occasionally.

One time at lunch, Warner told me that their company was moving their office to a different location in The Woodlands.

We started talking about what their new offices were going to look like.

Then Warner said:

“Hey, I got an idea.

Once we have moved into our new offices, would you come to our office and do an Office Blessing?”

I enthusiastically agreed to bless their offices, after they had made their move.

Now, Warner's company was not what I called very big.

They probably had a total of 12 to 15 employees.

All of the employees were excited about having the offices blessed.

One of the employees was Jewish, and I promised that I would be respectful of his beliefs.

On the day of the Blessing of the Office, Warner's company invited the real estate agent who had negotiated their new space to attend the blessing.

They invited the construction contractors who had worked on the build

out.

They laid out a little reception in the conference room.

And I set out from St. Mary's and went to the land beyond the Jordan, to the crossroads of corporate Houston, to the Galilee of the nations.

When I arrived at their offices, I was greeted warmly by everyone.

I went from office to office.

And as I did, I said a prayer of blessing over each worker, that what they would do in that office would be honest and would be of benefit each other.

At the end, we gathered in the conference room, and we held hands around the conference table - priest and lawyer and real estate agent and construction worker - and we asked God to bless the work of our hands and of our minds.

You see, Jesus does not just set up his lemonade stand in the middle of a church.

But Jesus goes to the crossroads of the world, to the land beyond the Jordan, to heal and to love and to bless.

Jesus sets up shop in Galilee of the nations.

Where, my friends, is your Galilee?

Whether your Galilee is in your home, or in a school classroom, or in an office, or in volunteer work, or in a truck, or in a cubicle,

I want you to know - that wherever your Galilee is,

Then that is your place of ministry.

Jesus' ministry did not begin in the Temple, in the "holy place" in Jerusalem.

And your ministry does not begin at St. Alban's, in this church with stained glass windows.

Your ministry begins in Galilee.

And we come together to worship each Sunday at St. Alban's, so that we will be encouraged to go back to our many different Galilees, situated at the crossroads of life, to reach as many people as

possible with the good news of God's healing, and love, and blessing.

For in the latter time, God will make glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan.

God will make glorious the place of *your* ministry, Galilee of the nations.

AMEN.

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