

Sermon

Walking in the footsteps of Jesus

Today's Gospel Reading begins with the words "When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side". Where was he? Where was he coming from? Where was he going?

Looking in earlier scripture, we learn that he was at Genesaret where he had encountered the Demoniac who was possessed by demons. Jesus cast the demons out into a herd of pigs that then plunged into the lake and drown. Genesaret was believed to have been located on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee. We believe he was returning to Capernaum, where he lived during his early ministry.

Again and again, we learn of the miracles and preaching that Jesus did along the shore of that lake, but we don't really know much about the setting.

Having visited the Sea of Galilee or as it is also known Lake Tiberius, I was struck by its relatively small size. Checking with Wikipedia, we learn that it is only about 13 miles North to South and 8 miles from East to West--- about 1/3 the size of Lake Winnebago in Wisconsin. It would have been a very insignificant place except where it was located. It was at the crux of two or three major trade routes. One going North and South along the Jordan River, another going North and South along the Mediterranean all the way from Egypt. And finally the major trade route from Haifa and Akko on the Mediterranean Sea to Damascus and on to Baghdad and Persia. It was a crossroads where people of all races and religions commonly met. Jesus would have grown up hearing many languages and

knowing people of many Religions. In fact, the Generasets were a pagan people and not of the Jewish faith, but a people with whom Jesus interacted and even performed miracles.

Since it was a major choke point for trade, it was also valued by the great empires of their day. The Babylonians, Persians, Greeks and Finally, the Romans all build fortresses and Provincial Governments in the area to control trade and collect taxes. It is recorded that the Demoniac cured by Jesus, was told by Jesus to witness to what God had done for him. It is recorded in Mark that he went out and preached to the “Decapolis” The Decapolis were the ten fortified Roman Cities that controlled Much of Israel. These were civilized places with Public Baths, Amphitheaters, Circuses, and Roman Garrisons.

The Sea of Galilee is unique in other ways. It is the lowest fresh water lake in the world. It is about 700 feet below sea level at the top of the great Rift Valley that divides the African and Arabian Tectonic Plates. That ever-widening rift valley passes along the Jordan River, under the Dead Sea and crosses to the Red Sea and finally into Africa where it passes below Lakes Turkana, Tanganyika and Malawi to the Zambezi River. All of those lakes being below sea level and will eventually split until they become a new ocean.

Being below sea level, the climate is tropical and humid. There are many banana and other tropical fruits grown along the shore in huge plantations. Now-a-days there are also large feed lots and dairy farms taking advantage of the water resources and irrigation available to grow feed for cattle.

I would highly recommend the tour that is sponsored by the Wisconsin Conference be added to your “bucket list”. It is conducted by a Theologian and since many of the pastors on the trip also are at least amateur Theologians, every day is passed in discussion and debate regarding the Scriptures and the Historical Jesus.

As the Scripture indicates Jesus was returning from a trip to his home in Capernaum. There was already a crowd on the docks awaiting him. It was so crowded that he could barely push through. And yet, suddenly he says “who touched me?” when he sensed some of his power draining away. His disciples considered it impossible to know the answer, yet Jesus searched. Suddenly the woman who suffered much of her life from bleeding, threw herself at Jesus’s feet and admitted it was she. She feared he would be angry, but instead, Jesus said, “Daughter, your faith has made you well, go in peace, and be healed of your disease”.

Jesus was informed of the serious illness of a child of the Leader of the Synagogue and was going to the man’s house when he was informed it was too late and the child was dead. Instead, Jesus told the father of the child to have faith. He told them the child is not dead, but only sleeps. The reply from many was laughter, but Jesus put them out and then with just the parents and his close followers went into the room where the child was and simply said: “Talitha Cum” which means “Little girl, get up!” He asked that no one speak of this miracle and only told them to give her something to eat.

Jesus’s purpose on earth wasn’t to be a faith healer, but to bring salvation to all people. His love for people caused him to do good wherever he went, but his message to us was to have faith and through Faith, we can all be saved.

One of the sites we saw in Capernaum was a Catholic Cathedral built over the ruins of several earlier churches and synagogues. The deepest and smallest was a house Synagogue which was reputed to have belonged to the Mother-in-law of Peter, but some believe actually belonged to Jesus. It is amazing looking down through the glass floor in that modern Cathedral through history, through time, through other churches and Synagogues to the very place where Jesus preached and may well have lived.

This area is often called the “Evangelical Triangle” where Jesus carried out over 60% of his Ministry and where he carried out his most noted preaching and miracles including The Beatitudes, the Feeding of the 5,000, walking on water, and preaching from the boat in natural amphitheaters on the lake shore.

Being able to visit these well researched sites can also help us to have faith that the True Christ once walked among us and died so that we would have eternal life. We can experience and walk in his footsteps even today.