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## Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

April 13, 2014

Looking for Jesus (*Location: Nazareth*)

*“Nathanael responded, ‘Can anything from Nazareth be good?’*

*Philip said, ‘Come and see.’”*

John 1:46 (Common English Bible)

It was an honest question. Nazareth was a tiny village with a population in Jesus’ day that is estimated to have been as little as 100 people. In the region of Galilee, Nazareth would be difficult to locate on a map, if it even appeared on a map. It was simply a small community of little significance; probably only ten to fifteen extended families. The birth home to Mary, Jesus’ mother, Nazareth was too small for strong employment prospects. What is more likely is that the few men who lived in Nazareth traveled to the nearby capital of Galilee, Sepphoris, to work each day. Nazareth was a sleepy, bedroom community.

So Nathanael is skeptical, “Can anything from Nazareth be good?” No ridicule was intended, only surprise. Nathanael reflected the popular opinion of the day. People that appeared on a world stage rarely came from such small villages. Nazareth is never mentioned in the Old Testament or in any available Jewish literature. The unimportance of Nazareth creates astonishment that one of its residents could possibly be the one spoken of by the prophets.

Philip’s response, “Come and see”, is the best remedy against preconceived opinion. And opinions about anyone significant coming from Nazareth were strong; ancestry to Nazareth is synonymous with lacking all human means of power. Perhaps that is the reason that God chose Nazareth as the birthplace for the Savior of the world. As New Testament scholar Dale Bruner observes, Jesus’ royal claim would be utterly incredible to all those who do not take God into account.

Often today we see people who live defeated lives. Marriages that are more difficult to sustain than ever thought imaginable on the wedding day, children who seem bent on making unfortunate choices, and preparing for a worry-free retirement in a difficult economic climate, all deplete us some days. It isn’t surprising the number of people who move through the day with shoulders slumped and furrows on their brows. Life is hard and resources to meet the challenges of each day seem scarce – that is if God isn’t taken into account.

What many people miss today – even occasionally good Christians – is that we were never intended to live only by human strength and power. We are promised more strength and more power than we are personally capable of. It is the power that was available to the one from Nazareth that drew the skepticism of Nathanael. Perhaps that is why so many people today make a pilgrimage to Nazareth. Deep down they are weary. They are desperate for refueling; for fresh energy for the living of these days.

If you make the pilgrimage to Nazareth, go humbly, get down under the noise of the large town it is today and wait for God in the silence of your hearts. There is no telling what you may hear or what you will discover. But the heart that is attentive to God will recognize that following Jesus has little to do with geography. Jesus has left Nazareth. In prayer, Jesus may be met personally right where you are now. And His power is ready to change you.

*Restore me, Heavenly Father, with a fresh encounter of the Risen Christ. Grant that I have the faith to lean on His strength, His power when I grow weary. In the certain Name of Jesus, I pray. Amen.*

Doug Hood

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