

“Synagogues”
Grove Presbyterian Church
February 5, 2012

New Testament Lesson and Reflection
Mark 1: 29-39

Location, location, location – the secret of business success. So the experts say.

Well it may.

True too for success in the preaching and healing business.

Look at this:

Homes and synagogues.

Synagogues and homes.

My home but our synagogue. You bet. Our place.

Good idea these synagogues. Created after Jerusalem destroyed, the temple leveled, the people carted off into slavery. People what they do: they bond. The gather together to remember their story.

Good idea these synagogues. After all the temple in Jerusalem was 70 miles away. A caravan away. Running the gauntlet of the occasional bandits too. And then when you're there it's the crush, the rush, its Christmas time in New York – expensive! Thrilling, but costly to the wallet. The temple makes out like a bandit. At least you can say you've been there. .

But the synagogue is home town. The synagogue is open seven days a week. The synagogue is the people's place, not the priests. It is local. It is democratic. It is the greatest social institution ever invented. It sustains faith and culture and civilization.

*Great religion has always been not a search for comfort
but a search for righteousness and truth!*

-- Harry Emerson Fosdick

Though a little comfort would be nice once in a while.

The synagogue is rabbi and elders and learning. Gathering on the Sabbath for invocation, psalms, prayers, scripture, exhortation, blessing.

Gee, sounds familiar. I wonder where we got the idea of church?

Same name.

Synagogue in Hebrew: the gathering place. More the people than the building.

Church in Greek: the gathering place. Where believers con-gregate. Congregation? More the people than the building.

Oh, pastor Bob, you have such lovely church.

Yes. They are.

Church buildings or church building?

Big difference. And the difference is the synagogue.

Six days a week the education place. Not for some. Where all are welcome. Talk, discussion, argument, meditation, exploration of soul and mind and heart and will -- together.

The glory and the power of Sunday school.

“Knowledge isn't a commodity

– *it is possessed only in its use and application*”

Knowledge is soul power.

So unusual from anything else we do. Where else this theological reflection? Where else the chance to critically reflect with other strugglers on what matters, who matters, what makes sense and what doesn't?

Our business here is simply the meaning of life. Creating answers for tough questions. It is a good location because it is good people. Honest people. Oddly enough, people who really care.

Where else the chance for knowledge of who and what and how and why and this essential process of ongoing growth?

Not us making sense of the Bible but the Bible making sense of us.

Where else can we learn to bet our lives that Jesus was right [Elon Trueblood]? Which for me is a pretty good bet considering the alternative.

No wonder the synagogue was Jesus' first port of call. How else to really connect? He loved the synagogue because he loved the people.

At least it was a good idea until he was no longer welcome at the synagogue.

But little matter. What Jesus shows is that it's really not the location.

Get him right and we've got a chance on the rest. Rather like marriage: you really focus on her or him, 100%, and the rest of the stuff works itself out, you got a chance.

It's the person that matters.

I like the line that reminds us how Jesus doesn't offer us an ideology, he offers us himself.

He's the place to be at.