

The City Quiz

Who knows which is the oldest non-fortified community in Alberta? (St. Albert, 1861)

Which municipality is the largest by area in Canada? (Wood Buffalo)

Which city has the highest population in the world? Tokyo 34.4 million people (est. 2008)

Highest population density? (Mumbai nearly 30,000 people per square km) St. Albert 1,647 per square km)

Percentage of the world's population that lives in cities?

Through most of history, the human population has lived a rural lifestyle, dependent on agriculture and hunting for survival. In 1800, only 3 percent of the world's population lived in urban areas. By 1900, almost 14 percent were urbanites, although only 12 cities had 1 million or more inhabitants. In 1950, 30 percent of the world's population resided in urban centers. The number of cities with over 1 million people had grown to 83.

The world has experienced unprecedented urban growth in recent decades. In **2008**, for the first time, the world's population was evenly split between urban and rural areas. There were more than 400 cities over 1 million and 19 over 10 million. More developed nations were about 74 percent urban, while 44 percent of residents of less developed countries lived in urban areas. However, urbanization is occurring rapidly in many less developed countries. It is expected that 70 percent of the world population will be urban by 2050, and that most urban growth will occur in less developed countries.

Percentage of Albertans who live in cities?

Approximately 81% of the population live in urban areas and only about 19% live in rural areas. The Calgary-Edmonton Corridor is the most urbanized area in the province and is one of the most densely populated areas of Canada.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_Alberta#Population_history

On Halloween eve, I drove a car load of high school students from our house to a Halloween party at Box 8, Site 16, RR#4 Edmonton. Having grown up on a farm in

southern Ontario, the drive felt a bit like going home. But two of the guys in the car could not get over how DARK it was once we left St. Albert on Sturgeon Rd. Some people love this. Some love to get out of town away from it all and live out on an acreage away from the madding crowd. But even if we do, there is no escaping the city with all of its noise and lights and traffic and people.

We are all urbanized.

The city means many things.

In the city we make connections with like minded people. We can become part of specific kinds of communities in the city. In Nashville they say, every person waiting on tables is working on a record deal. (ok, a bit tongue in cheek) Victoria, BC has a concentration of seniors. Some 6.4 percent of the population of Victoria and its surrounding area are more than 80 years of age. ("For the newly wed and nearly dead") Communities form in the cities based on everything from model trains, to sexual orientation.

(Today we have the ability to be part of virtual communities any where we have internet access)

In the city we can get lost. Some find country life to be warm and friendly, others find the 'everyone knowing everyone' to be stifling.

In the city we may find challenges that match the size of our gifts. Some are completely satisfied running a variety store in Fox Creek. But if you want to be involved

in corporate finance, or large scale construction or fashion or design, the city is where you need to be.

Cities have energy, life, vitality and cultural opportunities. Ozzie played Rexall. Ozzie will never play Riviere Qui barre. (Grey Cup) Cities have a concentration of ability and resources. Edmonton is home to a heart institute, a cancer treatment facility, and a children's hospital. Those institutions are not possible in a small community.

A city can be dangerous. There have been twenty two murders in Edmonton in 2010, to date. Being around others can put us at risk.

A city is a spiritual entity. When we think of a city and it's 'vibe' or 'feel' or 'spirit' we are talking in spiritual terms.

There is one Alberta city that I have experienced as rude and rushed more than once.

Bible belt communities around Grand Rapids, Michigan are completely quiet on Sunday mornings. No one cuts their lawn on Sundays there, or blows their snow.

A city is an embodiment of our collective human response to God, creation and fellow human beings. (A city says right out loud in concrete, pavement and steel, what and who we value).

From now till Christmas, we will be thinking about God and the city. What does God have to say about cities? Does God have a dream for cities? How do we as

followers of Jesus, citizens of another kingdom, live in our cities? And, a question we will come back to at the end of every sermon: How are we called to pray for our city?

We will start this morning by hearing two stories from the section of the Bible that claims to be telling the story of the whole world. (Genesis 1-11)

Let's listen to the account of the first city builder, then to the story of the first mega project. **(If you are reading this message on line, it will help quite a lot to read the passages now)** www.biblegateway.com can help if you don't have a Bible handy.

Genesis 4, Genesis 11:1-9 What do these two accounts have in common?

The first is more personal, it names names, we see personalities and hear them speak. The other is about a group of people. But there is a common thread.

Cain, beginning with his ragged offering of vegetables to the Lord, is spinning in an orbit outward away from the Lord.

The Lord reaches out to him. Cain ignores the Lord, instead killing his brother.

The Lord reaches out to Cain, warning him of the consequences of the actions he has set in motion. Creation itself will rebel against him. He will live a life of wandering. But Cain is afraid of homelessness, afraid that whoever finds him will kill him.

The Lord reaches out to Cain. The Lord puts a protective, gracious mark on him. So Cain goes out and lives in the land of wandering, east of Eden.

Cain and his wife have a baby, and **Cain builds the first city**. He names it Enoch, after his son. In the city Cain will be safe. The Bible tells us that the first city was built by an anxious, fearful man who would not listen to the Lord's warning, or to the Lord's promise of protection.

Cain was looking for security. He built a city. It seems he was safe there.

Cain's city is a place of culture and invention, music and industry.

The second story: Here is what the builders say:

"Come let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth."

Scattering and wandering is dangerous. Security is found in the city.

Here in these two stories, the first city, the first mega project, the issue is that Cain, and the Babel builders are looking for a security and safety apart from the Lord. Even against the Lord.

The Lord said at creation: 'be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it'.

Cain builds a city.

After the flood the Lord says to Noah: 'Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth.'

The builders of Babel say, "Let's build a city and a tower so that we will **not** be scattered over the whole earth".

As the Bible tells the story, the first cities are built in a search for a security apart from the Lord's promise of protection.

That needs to get our attention this morning, here at the start of Advent. in 2010.

Security and safety have our attention today, perhaps like never before. From airport pat downs to Mexican migrant workers being advised by their governments that they should travel in convoys for safety, to our driving over sized vehicles that were sold on the promise of safety, security concerns are everywhere.

But the security we are talking about is on a whole different scale than which home alarm company we go with, or who we buy insurance from. This security is

Where do you look for security? What is your only security in life and in death?

In another dangerous day, some Christians dared to answer that question this way:

"That I am not my own, but belong **body and soul** to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood and has set me free

from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my heavenly Father.

In fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me wholeheartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him". Heidelberg Catechism Q+A 1

We are direct spiritual descendants of the people who first confessed those words.

"I belong to Jesus". "Life and death." "Body and soul".

I may dare to live with courage. I may dare to give my all to the Lord, no matter what anyone else says. I do not need to be afraid of my neighbour, or suspicious of my neighbour or build walls to keep my neighbour out of my part of town. The courage I have by belonging to Jesus the Christ, is courage and confidence to love my neighbour.

A wall doesn't keep us fully safe. Military might doesn't bring the kind of security we really want. Cain's taste for revenge follows him into his city. His great, great, great grand-son sings a song of vengeance. "Lamech is avenged seventy times seven." (It seems that Jesus echoes Lamech when he asked about forgiveness. In doing so, Jesus is reminding us again that the way to security and safety is found in the courage he gives us, to forgive)

So thinking about our city now, St. Albert specifically, but also beyond...

Here is the question: Where do we as a community look for our security?

Wealth, keeping 'certain kinds of people out'?

What would it look like for a community of Jesus followers, within **this** city to find our full security, body and soul, life and death in Jesus Christ and his protection?

Who would we dare to reach out to, who would we dare befriend?

And here is our closing question:

Right now, right here, **how do we pray** for St. Albert and Edmonton, Morinville, Sturgeon and Parkland?

May the Lord be gracious to you and to me, and to our cities.

And all God's people said, Amen.