

# BUILDING A CHURCH

By Ian Menzies

The ruins of the Biblical town of Capernaum on the shores of the Sea of Galilee feature the remains of what is known as the “White Synagogue”, an impressively decorated 4th century construction of imported limestone, which sits atop the foundations of a Roman-era “Black Synagogue”, more humbly constructed from local basalt and which is the synagogue Jesus would have attended and taught in during the three years or so he lived in the town.

Nearby are the foundations of a simple fisherman’s home, thought to be that of his disciple Simon – later known as Peter, then St Peter – and is possibly where Jesus himself lived.

Archaeology tells us that one large room of that simple home became a public space as early as 50AD – perhaps it had become the very first Christian church.

Later a 5<sup>th</sup> century, octagonal Byzantine church was constructed around its foundations.

That church in turn crumbled with the town into obscurity, until being

rediscovered in 1838 and in later excavation by the Franciscans.

Today a 1990s, round ‘flying saucer’ like church with a glass floor hovers on eight stilts over the site, both protecting and enabling those foundation ruins to be viewed from above.

I wonder what Jesus would have made of all this church building and veneration.

A couple of fishing boats just off shore enabled him to address the crowd gathered on the water’s edge.

Just up the street was the synagogue and beyond the town the mountains and fields where his message was delivered.

While historically fascinating, and arguably helpful in contributing to the proclamation of his message, I doubt such buildings themselves would be the ‘church’ he envisaged.

Rather, ‘love one another’; ‘fear not’; ‘remember me’; and the like are the intangible maxims that we, the church, must strive to build upon – and to live up to.