

Small Towns  
Pastor John Hicks  
First United Methodist Church

In a country where bigger is usually considered better, more than 100,000 small town residents have voted to have theirs crowned the "Coolest Small Town in America." The poll was conducted by Budget Travel magazine. The editor shared the magazine was looking for Main Street, U.S.A. -- places where you find real people, excited to be part of their communities.

As for what makes a town "cool," is very subjective, but there is one really good marker: When people leave for the big city, they realize they've made a mistake and come back home

Small towns are just a little bit different. The nice part about living in a small town is that when you don't know what you're doing, someone else does." As someone has written, "You know you live in a small town when  
1) You can name everyone you graduated with. 2) You know what 4-H means. 3) You went to parties at a pasture, barn, gravel pit, or in the middle of a dirt road. On Monday you could always tell who was at the party because of the scratches on their legs from running through the woods when the party was busted. 4) You used to "drag" Main. 5) You said the "F" word and your parents knew within the hour. 6) You give directions by references rather than street names. Turn by the old Kelly house, go 2 blocks to Anderson's, and it's four houses left of the track field. 7) You could never buy cigarettes because all the store clerks knew how old you were (and if you were old enough, they'd tell your parents anyhow). 8) Your teachers called you by your older siblings' names. 9) Your teachers remembered when they taught your parents. 10) Someone asks you how you feel, and actually listens to what you say.

Jesus was born in a small town. Each year we sing Phillip Brooks' beautiful hymn, "O little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie. Above thy deep and dreamless sleep, the silent stars go by. Yet in thy dark streets shineth the everlasting Light. The hopes and fears of all the years are met in thee tonight."

Bethlehem today is a city of approximately 50,000 people, but when Jesus was born it was a tiny village. The message of Christmas would be just as powerful if Christ had been born in a great metropolis, but somehow this tiny village seems to capture the essence of the Christ event.

Bethlehem reminds us that God can use ordinary people and ordinary places in an extraordinary way. God can use us.