

## **“Leaving Home, Finding Home”**

**Ruth 1:1-18**

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**San Dimas Community Church, United Church of Christ**

**Rev. Joyce Kirk-Moore**

The Bible is like a Traveler’s Guide for people leaving home and then finding home. “A wondering Aramean was our father” Abraham who leaves the land of Ur, guided by God to a new homeland. Later, Jacob flees from home because he’s stolen Esau’s birthright and finds a home with Laban whose daughters he marries creating a new family and a new home. Moses leaves Egypt the only home he’s ever known and becomes a fugitive. His new home becomes a tent city; his vagabond family follows a pillar of fire by night and a cloud by day.

The story of Ruth is one more of these stories where one must leave home in order to find home. It begins with Elimelech’s family leaving home because they were starving. Borders between one country and another were fluid back then (if existent at all); but Elimelech takes his family and leaves home going to the land of Moab. In Moab he finds food, his sons find wives, and the family finds home. Then years later Elimelech’s wife, Naomi, is left a widow and childless. Her husband and her sons die, and desperate once again Naomi decides to make the journey back to Bethlehem in Judah. At first her two daughters-in-law accompany her. Then with Naomi’s encouragement, Orpah does the sensible thing; with love and tears she bids her mother-in-law goodbye and goes back to her own family to live out her days in Moab.

In our Wednesday night Bible Study we talked about how crazy it was for Ruth to insist on going with Naomi. It was dangerous enough for Naomi to make that journey, but at least Naomi was returning to her home of birth. Ruth would be a foreigner, an alien, and her future was hopeless. But Ruth loved Naomi with a love that would not let her go; therefore, all that meant home to her was bound up in her devotion to Naomi. She finds her home, her place of belonging, with her mother-in-law.

The seemingly genteel words we often hear at weddings were really desperate words of an oath that once spoken could not be taken back. “Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die--there will I be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!” Thus the words were spoken, and with them Ruth is destined to leave her home in Moab forever and seek and find a new home in the land of Judah.

“Home” evokes deep emotions within us. Doris Hutchinson in Wednesday mornings Bible study said that she and Jim still call Scotland home after 51 years. Here in our United States many transplanted people still have heart strings pulling them to faraway places they remember as home. It’s hard to leave home. I remember when I was a youth pastor; some of the young people who had the closest relationships with their parents, when they became seniors in high school, would suddenly break away from mom and dad in ways that were often hurtful. They needed somehow to prove to themselves that they *could* actually leave home and survive without the parents to whom they felt such closeness.

There is also a spiritual dimension to leaving home. We human beings are in search of our heart’s true home. It is a home within the very heart of God. We know we are temporary travelers, aliens on earth, “poor wayfaring strangers.” We live in this in-between time of birth and life and death and finding our home in God. But this doesn’t mean this in-between time is time to twiddle our thumbs; this is not time to waste. These moments are of great importance. The deci-

sions we make, the actions we take, the impulses for love and good and generosity and wholeness that we send forth into the world bring us closer to the heart of God.

In the Book of Ruth the moments, the details are significant and make all the difference. Tom says these details are not as clear to us when read in English rather than Hebrew; yet a Hebrew would pick up on the significance of the story's details. We'll take note of those next week when we hear the "rest of the story." Today as Doris said, the text leaves us with a cliffhanger.

In process theology, which is a way to understand the world and God as a universe of relationships that are always in process, details are important. Each moment holds possibilities and each moment is an opportunity for choices to be made. Life is in constant creation, ongoing process. The past does not have to be repeated; the status quo does not have to be maintained. The way things have always been done doesn't have to be the way we do them in the future. God is constantly saying to us "you don't have to live that way." God is inviting us to an alternative reality, a new way of being in the world. Every day we have the chance to find our true home in the heart of God.

Today is All Saints Day and we celebrate Holy Communion. The saints we remember, particularly those who are saints to us individually, are those who came into our lives and empowered us; those saints led us to God; those saints taught us the meaning of home. When we lost our way, they led us gently home. And we remember.

In this sacrament of Holy Communion we demonstrate through our actions the meaning of leaving home and finding home. We say through words and through sharing this meal that our home is wherever Christ leads us. We need to do this because we need to remember. This sacrament ties us to our families and our roots in the deep recesses of Christian history, and it reminds us to keep on traveling down the road that leads us home. Like children, we want to constantly ask, "are we there yet?" Part of the answer is that wherever and whenever we share this meal, we share in the journey, and as the great feminist, Nelle Morton wrote, *The Journey is Home*.

Leaving home, finding home...it's our lifelong spiritual task. My favorite words on home are those of my teacher Marjorie Suchocki. Though written in prose, I suggest you listen to them as poetry:

"There is a home in God, a home for the whole universe. In that home, multiplicity finally achieves unity, and fragmentation is embraced in wholeness. The unity and wholeness receiving and transforming each part is more than the sum of them all, for the unity is the ever-living God, drawing upon the divine resources of infinite possibility to blend all reality into the giving and receiving of the whole....:" This home is "divinely sustained as the most fitting actuality of unity, beauty, and holiness: [it is] the reign of God which is the reign *in* God, which is God."

I, for one, am glad that I am "leaving home and finding home" with you. AMEN