

If you weren't with us Sunday, we missed you. AND you missed Eddie and Sabrina in their Halloween costumes-a remarkably real looking angler fish and a lovely mermaid! And Payson and Natalie told us they were Pippi Longstocking and Hermione. Perfect casting! The children and I talked about the beginning of Halloween and the three days of AllHallowTide. The children are continuing to collect nonperishable foods and coins for the Food Pantry. Their next endeavor is the Samaritans Purse Christmas boxes for Syrian refugees. If you have shoeboxes, please bring them in!

During communion we marked All Saints Day and All Souls Day by lighting candles and naming members of the community and church who have gone on to prepare a place for us. We held in prayer: Pat Peterson and Janet Dorman, the minister of Foreside Community Church. We lit the memorial candle for Doris Russell and Carl McCloy. Please hold dear Betty House in your prayers.

We closed with a rousing rendition of "When the Saints Go Marching In"!

I had lovely visits with Maude Olsen, Gerry Kelsey and Janet Claar this week.

We began a two week series on the Book of Ruth.

GOSPEL READING Mark 12:28-34-Jesus' answer to the scribe comes from the Shema in Deuteronomy. Jews recited these words daily and would have understood them as God speaking through Moses, the lawgiver. The quote would have identified Jesus as part of the prophetic tradition of Isaiah, Jeremiah and others. Claiming this word as divine law to themselves had the additional effect of identifying themselves as people belonging to God in special relationship.

EPISTLE READING Hebrews 11:1-3, 29-12:2-On the tenth day of the seventh month of each year, the high priest offered the sacrifice of animals to atone for the sins of the people. Symbolically, he took his own sins and those of his people with him into the Holy of Holies, and there he made sacrifice. Several different animals were used. The blood of bulls was used to atone for the sins of the priest, the blood of goats was used to atone for the sins of the people, and a special red heifer was used to wash away the sins of anyone having contact with the body of a dead person. Christ's sacrifice was superior because it was the offering of his own blood. His atonement for our sins was a perfect sacrifice with no impurities.

HEBREW SCRIPTURE READING Ruth 1:1-18 Elimelech, his wife, Naomi, and their sons, Mahlon and Chilion, left their home in Bethlehem during famine. Ironic, as the word Bethlehem means – house of bread. Elimelech and his family were immigrants, refugees in a land not their own. They went to Moab, a land of some hostility. The Moabites are part of Abraham's extended family descended from the incestuous union of Lot and his daughters and were held in disdain by the Israelites.

Alpha and Omega, beginning and ending of all creation, in Your word we are unbound from death, and brought out into eternal life in you. Amen

MESSAGE

Wherever You Go

Beth Hood

Today is a day to celebrate those who have gone before us, indeed, it is only one day in a three day observance called Allhallowtide. Yesterday was Halloween, today is All Saints Day and tomorrow is All Souls Day. Today, All Saints Day is a celebration of more well-known believers, martyrs and heroes of the

faith. All Souls' Day, tomorrow, is meant to be a more solemn occasion with an emphasis on lesser-known Christians, especially the ones we have known personally.

As we will do later in the service for our own loved ones, if there had been an All Souls' Day when Jesus was growing up, one of the souls his family would have honored would have been Ruth.

Without books, radios, or TV, stories were the entertainment in Jesus' day. That is after all, how we have the stories of the Bible. Hearing the stories of God at work in the world, most of us are entirely impressed: God speaking creation into being, God laying the foundations of the life of faith through great and definitive fathers and mothers, God saving a people out of a brutal slave existence and then forming them into lives of free and obedient love, God raising up leaders who lead their people through tangles of difficulties always involved in living joyfully and responsively before God.

Impressive indeed! So impressive, in fact, that many of us, while remaining impressed may also feel left out. Our very ordinary lives make us feel like outsiders to such a star-studded cast. Who among us imagines himself a Moses or a Christ, or herself to be Mary? But then we come upon a story of Rahab or Ruth, ordinary people in difficult circumstances.

I imagine great, great...grandmother Ruth was one whose story was often repeated around Joseph's fire in the evening when the work of carpentry was done. She was an example parents would have wanted to hold up to their children.

In the patriarchal society of their day, Naomi, Orpah and Ruth are nobodies once their husbands die. Things were looking pretty bleak. In this story, the leading characters are those most on the margins, the least powerful, those with the fewest resources except their wits, their determination, their faithfulness to each other. Sound familiar? Can you imagine the young Jesus listening with his brothers and sisters; recalling the stories years later as he walked with his disciples among the same kinds of people?

We might make a comparison of Ruth and Naomi to Abraham and Sarah, the patriarch and matriarch who left their homeland and all that was familiar, trusting in the promises of God and becoming the ancestors of a great people they would never see, descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky. Of course, Ruth didn't have the advantage of a direct conversation with God. When the story begins, that was not even her God. But a call from God can come in many different ways. Like Abraham and Sarah, Ruth takes that uncertain journey into the unknown and the unfamiliar, trusting in God, and in doing so, becomes an important part of the story of the people she embraces as her own. "Abraham became the father of a nation, but Ruth will be the mother of its line of kings."

What inspired such loyalty in Ruth toward Naomi. The name Naomi means pleasant. But that side of her is not so apparent when the story begins. In fact, shortly after arriving back home in Bethlehem, she changes her name to Mara, meaning bitter. Perhaps in happier times back in Moab Naomi was kind and even motherly to her daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah. She must have had a kind of faith that inspired Ruth, a stubborn faith that led Ruth to her own new life, in a new place, in a new people. A kind of faith that generations later inspired a young boy named Jesus.

This simple yet beautiful story leads us to deeper reflection on the experience of refugees and immigrants, and on the pressing need for survival that impels them to leave home. It might also suggest

that God often chooses the most unexpected places and times to let one of us 'clay pots' reveal the treasure within, the image of God, in which we were created: who would expect that a woman of historic faith, one of God's own people, might encounter the image of God in the unconditional, faithful love of a pagan widow, a foreigner on a lonely and perilous road in a place far from home?

Ruth faced formidable challenges in continuing this journey to a place where everything would be different, from food and language to religious and social practices, and her unfamiliarity with all of these things would mark her as an outsider, much as today we might recognize someone 'from away' by their accent. She was definitely leaving her comfort zone behind.

As we continue the story next week, we will see that God is certainly at work here, in subtle but powerful ways, even if seas do not part and manna does not fall from the sky. God's own faithfulness is seen in Ruth's faithfulness, and God's lovingkindness embodied in the tender and faithful care Ruth offers Naomi.

We can learn some important lessons from this foreigner, this outsider, this lowly widow, about reaching beyond our own protective walls and opening ourselves to unexpected and new life.