

Sermon: Your Home Will Be My Home**Scripture: Ruth 1:1-18****Preacher: Rev. Will Burhans****Date: November 6, 2021**

It is appropriate this morning to have reference to this beautiful story from the Book of Ruth in the Hebrew scriptures and it's appropriate for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that it is a story about home. And here we are on the morning after we had the presentation from Willie Barronet in Ripley Chapel last night called "We Are All Homeless" and if you go down there now you will see a very moving display of signs from people across the country on the streets who have no home, are in need of home and other necessities basic to the living of a dignified human life. This afternoon we'll ordain Lisa Loughlin into the Christian ministry for the purpose of her serving as minister in a church for the homeless as well. It's a beautiful thing that this congregation in many ways helped to mid-wife into being Lisa's beautiful ministry to the homeless.

Threading throughout our sacred texts, Old Testament and New is this central motif of home and homelessness, from Adam being banished from his Eden home to Jesus, the Son of Man, with no place to rest his head and everywhere in between. Abraham and his brood were nomadic wanderers until God granted them a home in the land of Israel. Joseph and his brothers led the people of Israel out of their home and to Egypt in a time of famine where they eventually became slaves in Egypt. They became homeless again when Moses led them out of slavery and they wandered in the wilderness until eventually they wound their way back to the Promised Land and came home again to Israel. And that's all before you even get out of the first book of the Bible, Genesis. This

motif of exodus or exile from home and the eventual return happens again and again in the biblical historical accounts and then becomes a prime spiritual theme for understanding our uneasiness, our dis-ease at being here on earth and in these bodies, the suggestion being, as Augustine said, we are never fully at home until we find our home in God.

The story of Ruth is one particularly poignant story of home and homelessness set in a dire time in the history of Israel. It's a beauty of a book that even if you don't know it, you might be familiar at least with a portion of it because it occasionally shows up in readings at weddings. Ruth is one of the shorter books of the Bible and is briefly the story of a Hebrew family who leave Bethlehem because of a famine and travel to a foreign land known as Moab. Naomi is the wife of Elimelech and they have two sons. As they come to Moab tragedy strikes their family and the husband dies, which in the patriarchal world of first century Mediterranean especially, would be a tragic enough situation for a woman far from other relatives to lose her husband but to compound that, her two sons eventually die as well. But they had been married to Moabite women in the meantime – one named Orpah and the other Ruth – and so there they are 3 grieving women who have lost their husbands and are alone to fend for themselves.

Maybe they had a roof over their heads but for all intents and purposes without the male presence in that culture they would be vulnerable and poor for sure, if not homeless. They manage for many years until word comes to Naomi that the famine has ended and she decides to return to her homeland of Israel. She tells her daughters-in-law to stay in Moab, their own homeland and find husbands for themselves among their own people. They both protest, Naomi

insists, and Orpah leaves but Ruth clings to Naomi determined to go with her and this is where the words used at weddings come – “do not press me to leave or to turn back from following you! 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 and there I will be buried.” It’s a beautiful expression of devotion and love, from a daughter-in-law to her mother-in-law. She is willing to leave home, to risk homeless in order to make her home with Naomi. It’s the narrative representation of the well-worn phrase “home is where the heart is.”

And so Naomi and Ruth returned to Israel and the little town of Bethlehem together. Eventually the foreigner Ruth finds a husband in a good farmer named Boaz and they have a son and name him Obed who was the father of Jesse who was the father of the greatest King of Israel, David, and for our purposes as Christians, the many greats grandfather of Jesus of Nazareth who himself was born in Bethlehem of Judea at the still point of the turning age, born homeless and in a stable, set adrift in Palestine with nowhere to lay his head except eventually in a tomb but who became the invitation to all people to find their home finally in God.

In this world we may be among the fortunate ones who not only have a home but many of us have homes of great comfort compared to so many others, but who among us have homes that aren’t tainted by turmoil, pain, struggle, and grief at times? I’m thinking of the Lauterwasser’s home right now within which their family is adjusting to that home in the stark absence of their devoted and faithful patriarch in Bruce even as we are adjusting to his painful absence in our family of faith here at First Congregational. Others of us have families struggling with members with mental illness, with the dissolving of relationship, with

addiction and facing absence of one fromm or another. Who among us have homes that are purely places of comfort and peace? Who among us have homes in our lives that we can't go back to for whatever reason? Home is a tenuous and sketchy thing is all that I'm saying and from a religious perspective we are all homeless on a certain level until we find our home across the veil and in God.

I realize I'm saying a different thing than contemporary eastern-infused spirituality among us which says home is a matter of waking up to the true heaven within, of not believing the stories that separate us from the truer reality of being-at-home here and now. I'm not saying that's wrong and Jesus even suggests it at certain points in his teachings, that heaven is within us and among us, closer to us than we can imagine, but there's a both-and-ness to the scriptural teachings about home, yes there are beautiful moments when we experience home and eternity in the here and now but those are fleeting and we should be careful grasping at them to make them stay within the homeless realm of this world. Bruce is home, Vandy is home, Janice is home, we are not, yet, but if only in a fleeting moment here and there. And that is the religious meaning of the statement We Are All Homeless, even though I don't think that Willie Baronet means it like that, it's a perfectly valid religious statement as well.

And facing that spiritual reality of our essential homelessness can become our motivation and inspiration for tending to and taking care of those who are literally homeless in our midst as we recognize their homelessness in our own, their humanity in our own, as we see that in their homelessness is the Lord Jesus' homelessness, Christ in them and they in Christ. We are not so different, all of us homeless until we find our home in God. In the meantime may we help one another in making this journey a little more easeful and tolerable with a sandwich

here, an open door welcome there, a gift of money there and sacrifice of time here, remembering that our own security and privilege is to a large extent a happy fault cause of where and how we've been born and supported over the length of our days.

But my prayer for us all whether we live in a home fit for a king or are struggling through our homelessness in hope that some semblance of a home will eventually come to us is that we will know those people in our lives who, like Ruth towards Naomi, call out of us a devotion and out-pouring of ourselves such that together the foundation and form of true home, namely love, is something we can experience before finally we are all called to our final lodging at the last where together we will gather in peace, in the Spirit of Jesus Christ where your home will be my home, your people, my people, and your God my God, amen!