

Homily for All Saints' and Communion Sunday November 1, 2015

Based on: A reading from the Book of Ruth, Chapter 1, verses 1-18, "Ruth goes with Naomi" and from the gospel according to Mark, Chapter 12, verses 28-34. "Which commandment is the first of all?"

Offered by: the Rev. Liz Bowyer

For the people of Knox United Church, Vancouver, B.C.

I want to begin by sharing with you that my absolute favourite services to plan and preside at are those the high holy days of the church calendar.

You know the ones I mean? Easter, Pentecost, Remembrance Day, Christmas Eve and of course today, All Saints Sunday. Our service today is one of those perfect examples of a high holy Sunday in the church year when we celebrate those we have loved and released into God's care this last year and also those who, have among the communion of saints surrounding us like so great a cloud of witnesses.

I love the high holy Sundays we celebrate for a couple of reasons.

One reason is that they allow us to do things a little differently.

You know what I mean?

There is often special music or a special ritual of a sort or candle lighting as there will be today.

Then there's the opportunity for folks to come among us who don't always attend church.

I, myself, have numbered among them.

Long before I entered into paid accountable ministry, I sometimes found myself standing in the grocery line up and overhearing someone talk about a special service at church.

Or I might have found myself nudged in some way by a phone call from a friend or a neighbour to come to a special church service such as ours this morning

Regardless of what might have brought you here today, we are glad you are here and we hope the feeling is mutual!

As we move into this set apart time and space marked by the reading of names and lighting candles and as we come to the lifting up all those who have gone before, a variety of images, memories, and feelings might arise, and that is just as it should be.

Here in God's home where we form a particular community for the purposes of worship, may we take comfort in knowing this: The same God who accompanied our ancient faith ancestors is with us now, here, now, in this time and in this place. The same God who accompanied Ruth, and Orpah, and Naomi; the same God who accompanied Jesus and his followers into Jerusalem, and the same God who brought people into conflict because of their faith and their faith practices is with us here this day.

Thinking back on the story from Mark's gospel this morning, I am reminded of one of my favourite bands from the '60's, The Beatles. You remember-'She Loves You, Yeah, Yeah, Yeah'" or 'All My Lovin' or even "Love, love, love, all you need is love".

We could go on on and on to reminisce about other love songs but my purpose is just to offer a bridge from secular culture into our readings from scripture this morning.

Here in chapter 12 of Mark's gospel, Jesus reminds all present that the first rule of right relationship is this: We are called to 'love the Lord our God with all our hearts, and with all our souls, and with all our mind, and all our strength AND we are called to love our neighbour as ourselves'.

As we consider the saints in our lives, who among us would dispute that indeed, the connections we feel might aptly be summed up in the word 'love'?

Not the romantic nor cheesy type of love but the kind of courageous love that stands firm in the face of adversity and that can even trump it.

Of course we also have this most extraordinary example of love or we might call it loving kindness found in the story of Ruth and Naomi.

Embodying a relationship of loving kindness defying explanation is what I heard in this story about three desperate women whose very survival depended standing together.

Though we have but little time to probe the story of Ruth more deeply, the love that each of the woman has for the other is the same understanding of love which Jesus speaks of in the Mark reading.

Perhaps it's the same kind of love or loving kindness that springs to mind for you as we consider the saints of your lives you have had to release into God's care.

Perhaps it's the same kind of love you've shared with someone whose identity has been marred by the same kind of grief and loss Naomi experienced.

Perhaps it's the kind of love you have offered as an accompanying presence to another in the midst of loss and grief.

Whatever the case, we are here to remember the saints of our lives-the folks through whom God's light and love shines.

Perhaps they are folks, who like Naomi, and Ruth, and Orpah, and Jesus, who behaved in the most amazing and extraordinary of ways in the midst of the challenges of living and of dying.

Or perhaps not.

I am aware that sometimes the saints of our lives also have feet of clay.

This also reminds me, All Saints Sunday is *also* a time for us to celebrate the legacy those saintly ones have passed on to each one of us for our own lives.

I really like how Fred Beuchner's describes the purpose of All Saints Sunday when he says:

"On All Saints Day, we should remember *not just the saints*, but all the foolish and wise ones, the shy ones, the overbearing ones, the broken ones, and the whole ones, the despots and the tosspots, the crackpots of our lives...the ones we loved without knowing we loved them and through whom we were helped to whatever little hope we have of becoming saints ourselves." (The Sacred Journey, p. 290)

It seems to me that in addition to what Beuchner says, somehow it's through them a little of that 'saintliness' rubs off on ourselves and onto the lives of those around us.

This celebrating of saints and of absorbing some 'saintliness' into our own lives is no small order.

But, I also know this-when the going inevitably gets tough, we can take comfort in resting in these words from St. Paul addressed to the people in his letter to the Hebrews: “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us....” May it be so, amen.