

Calvary United Methodist Church
August 4, 2019

RUTH: A FAITHFUL FRIEND
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Children's Message:

Proverbs 3:5 ICB

I invite our children to come forth at this time for the children's message. Those who would like to come forward this morning. Good morning. You can come on up if you'd like to.

I want to share a story about trusting in God. Every day that we get awake we have to trust in God, right? We have to trust God that there will still be food on the table. We trust God that we'll be able to have some clothing to put on in a short time when vacation is over. We trust for the weather that the rains come and feed all the critters in the world and care for the crops in the ground and all those things. But sometimes we forget and this scripture says:

Trust the Lord with all your heart. Do not depend on your own understanding.

There are times I try to trust in me and I fail. Do you ever forget things? Yeah. Do you ever forget things? I have to trust God because there are so many times I would be in trouble if I just trusted me. And the story today is about some people who had to really trust in God as a part of their life because they were facing some very tough times. In the midst of it, when we find out that we trust God, we know that not only can we trust God, God has a plan for you. I don't know God's plan for you, but I know it is wonderful and I know God will be with you all the days of your life.

The story I want to tell you is about some people who are having a very tough time. It's hard to imagine but sometimes, in some parts of the world, the rains don't come and in this part of the world it was Israel in this story, it's a big nation over in the Middle East and they were having like a desert time. There was drought and that meant there wasn't food, there weren't farms growing things and the animals didn't have water, the people didn't have water. So, there was a man named Elimelech and his wife, her name was Naomi, and they took their two sons, Kilion and Mahlon and they took a journey. They didn't go by bus or plane or train or car or horse. They had to walk. That would be like us picking up today and having to walk to a whole new country. That would be pretty difficult, wouldn't it? So in the midst of that they went there and some sad things happened in that the men all passed away through the years they were there. And there were these three women in a strange land and they could not have the kind of jobs that would support them and it was a difficult place. I'm sure there were language problems and yet Naomi the mother and the wife of Elimelech and the mother of the two sons said: We can trust my God; my God will provide a way for us.

So, the lesson for us today is when we get into touch positions, don't worry, God somehow

even though we don't know, those women didn't know how they were going to have a life the way they would have it, but God would make a way. And as the story goes, the old woman told the other two, Naomi was the older woman and she told her two daughter-in-laws that they should maybe go home and find new husbands. And one of them said she would agree to do that and you can see in this picture, she is going to return and go home, but the other daughter loved Naomi so much because she saw what she did.

Do you know that there are other boys and girls that watch you and adults watch you to see how you live? And I watch and you watch everyone around you. You like what they do or sometimes you see people do things and you don't like what they do. They might be mean, they might do things they shouldn't do. We see it on the news and television.

God wants us to be loving and caring for forgiving and giving and a lot of wonderful things and this lady named Ruth didn't grow up in a family where God was present, but instead she came into this family and she watched Naomi. Just by watching her she said: I want to follow the God that you follow. I want to be loving and caring and forgiving and giving the way you are.

And so she followed her and they made a way to find a new life. And the theme was reminding them all the time that God makes a way for us even when we don't know how we are going to do it.

So, I started thinking: how do I know that God makes a way and I thought of something as simple as brushing your teeth. How many of you went out this morning and bought a toothbrush or toothpaste? How did it appear? How did it get there? (Child speaks.) You squeezed it? But how did it come into your house? (Child speaks.) Your parents probably bought it for you. And I thought to myself: I don't know that I ever said to mom and dad, thank you for my toothbrush and paste. It just magically appeared.

God is like that. He does stuff and we forget. I looked at that photo again this morning and thought: boy, I wish I was there. Some of you do too, right? Did you have breakfast this morning? How did it get there? You parents did it again. What are you doing? Did you cook breakfast for your parents? You will someday, I'm sure.

Our parents magically, not magically, they do it why? They love you. And God says: I love you. No matter where you are, God says: I am going to help you. Those things don't magically appear, they appear because your mothers and your fathers and grandparents and people who look after you love you. And God says I love you all the time to us. When we meet our new friends, it's not just by accident. God has a plan that we meet friends and when we start saving to do things, did you ever save to buy something you really want? We save and we save and we save and sometimes even when we break the bank it's not quite enough like if you want to buy a new car you have to have a very big bank, right? But in all of those things, it's a reminder that God cares for us and that we ought to trust God.

And yet, I have to say, when you see the next picture, I still feel like this someday. Why do you cry? Do you ever cry? One young boy this morning says he never cries. I still cry when I don't get my way sometimes. You plan to do things, and it doesn't work out and you don't like change, someone changes plans. Some of you are probably...are any of you going to a new school this year? Is that a little frightening? Is it a little exciting? Yes! Well, sometimes, at least for me when I see change it can be both exciting and frightening. You move to a new house, you move to a neighborhood, you move to a new country, you find that people are different, we speak differently, the foods we eat are different.

We like change if we are in charge, but sometimes change is a little frightening. And here are these women, they had to leave their country to go to a new country and God says to us: don't worry about the change. As this new school year, some might worry: I wonder if my school teacher will like me. I wonder if I'll be able to do my math and science and English and phys ed and all those things. You know we get our mind going on those things. Some people out there wonder about those things, right? Sometimes people have to pack up and move to new places. We've had people here at church that moved from North Carolina for jobs. We've had others who serve in the military and they go all over the world and they are away from their family and friends and before they get where they are going, God is there because our God says: Wherever you are, in school, at home, in play, with friends or even if you think you are in trouble, God says I'm already there for you. Stop worrying, just trust in God.

And He says how long should you trust him? Always.

These stories I tell you are 2000 years old and they knew they could trust in God and here we are, 2000 years later knowing that we can still trust God. So, I pray this week as you face any changes, you'll remember the story about a woman named Ruth who trusted God because she learned about him from her mother-in-law.

Thank you for coming up this morning. You have a wonderful week.

Old Testament Lesson:

Ruth 2:10-12

I would like to tell a little story here today about Ruth. In a little background I would lift it up for you to read all the chapters. It is not a long book of the bible, but a beautiful story. Times were tough in Israel. A drought had hit the land and it was at a time when Israel should have been listening to judges and others. They knew about their God but they were pretty lawless bunch of people. They had walked away from God. When tough times come and you are a family person, you have to do whatever it is to keep your family alive. So this man named Elimelech took his wife Naomi and their two sons Mahlon and Kilion and they headed to a new country, Moab. God recommended his people not go into ungodly countries not because they were worried about blood mixing, but you don't want to mix those who are

believers with unbelievers. And yet they get there and the sons find two wives; they find Ruth and Orpah who were unbelievers, but through the process of living with Naomi and her family, these two girls came to know the Living God.

If you ever wonder about the power of your witness, not yakking, not just preaching, the power of someone watching your life, saying I want to love and be the kind of person this is. That's what Naomi was to them.

Tougher times came while they were in Moab. Naomi's husband, Elimelech, died and so did her two sons. Now, here are three women in a land probably without employment and wondering how in the world they are going to survive. And I want you to hear these words.

Message:

This story is about a faithful woman who had watched her mother-in-law and they decided now to go back to Israel and it was there her mother-in-law introduced her to another man name Boaz and he was so impressed that she would leave her people and her country and her land and everything familiar to trust this woman she had not known long. Folks, if you ever wonder the power of your witness, the power of your living testimony, the power of how you live for God, this is it. People are watching us all the time and when Ruth at one point was wonder what she should do, the mother said: Look, I'm too old. I don't have any younger sons. Here is another part of culture we don't practice. Typically if your sons were married to someone and they died you would give that daughter-in-law to your next son. You want to be careful who your family marries. She said why don't you go back to your homeland and she said I cannot do that. She said it to both of them and Orpah decided to go back to Moab to live there. But Ruth clung to her mother-in-law, Naomi.

Their hearts were broken. Can you imagine losing everything you had in one land, going to another, losing those you love and now you have to start over again? And yet they were taught time and time again: when you feel you are at the edge of everything, there is no hope, there is no future, God says: Trust Me!

We don't know the plan, but I know the plan, God has something for you. It won't be the same. It will be a change but God will be with you and it's really really hard when you are in the desert of your life. There is no one in this room who hasn't been there, when you think nothing more can happen to take me down. What can I do? What do I cling on? God says: Hold tight. I am your God, I will be with you.

And to this one, when Naomi said to Ruth to go, this is how much Ruth loved her from her witness:

Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go,

where you will stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God will be my God.”

She was so excited about this God that Naomi exemplified in her life that she wanted to follow that same God.

Do you ever have that place in your life where you are torn, you have those mixed emotions? You are excited? Here she saying you can go back to your own country or you can go with me where you know nobody. It's like, you know, you ask a child do you want to go with this grandma or this grandpa or whatever and it's like two good things and you are mixed and you can't make up your mind. And she had to be thinking in her mind: what do I do with my life? It seemed so hopeless at this time. And it was just as hopeless in Israel because, according to the scriptures in those days Israel had no king. Everyone did as he saw fit. That pretty much sounds like America right now. We do as we see fit. In other words, I'm going to do my thing whether it affects you or not. Folks, we naught to be doing our thing...we need to be doing God's thing. We need to be searching.

And so this story of Ruth, the book and I hope you'll read it, it's about faithfulness and what we learn from being faithful. It's about integrity. I could tell you those two daughter-in-laws if they had a mean mother-in-law who didn't witness to God, they wouldn't have been following her anywhere, right? Mother-in-laws and daughter-in-laws don't always get along. This woman, Naomi, was a remarkable woman and a witness to the power of God's love.

And these women that looked after her, they saw an integrity and honesty and caring, something about her, that taught them the third point of learning that God is my protector, the one I will lean on in all the difficult times will be there when I need God most.

One of the things we've learned sometimes in our culture is this thing about work, that we can be self-made men and women. Folks, I see people around the world work every bit as hard as we do, every bit, try to eke out an existence in a desert or weather there aren't really seasons and where there are rains and floods and they work hard and they never get ahead because it's like all of life is against them. But here we work and we obtain and we get stuff and boy do we get it. Nice homes and cars and vacations and, you know, things that... retirement and health care that a lot of the world couldn't even dream of any of that. We think we have these vacations every year. I can assure you some of our grandparents probably never went on a vacation in their life, and went on a weekend to a state park or something. But what we learn is we often depend on ourselves. And when we depend upon ourselves it gets us into big trouble because when we depend on these things to give us happiness we forget there's an end story.

We don't talk about the end of life much anymore, about heaven and hell and about the idea of getting ready to meet God, but there was this note to someone who thought they had it all. Remember the rich young ruler, he says: Look at this, I've got all the wealth. My silos are

full. I have everything I need. I'm set for life. I hear people say that about retirement: I'm set. You hear this: Just then God showed up and said, "Fool! Tonight you will die. And your barnful of goods—who gets it?"

Wow! That's a life changer. You see, we don't talk about the endgame, but the endgame really isn't about our stuff. It's about a relationship with a God who is faithful, a God who say: I want to be Number One more than this world. I don't want you to have your focus on what you get here. I want you to see with your eyes a better kingdom.

When I look at the brokenness around us...yesterday two mass slaughterings, murders. Two. Folks, people need God. We need to learn about love and grace and mercy and forgiveness and we need to get rid of the hatred in our culture, in our lives. And it's not out there, it's in here. And it's in here. God calls us to be the people that others should look for. He wants like a breath of fresh air. You know what it's like in August. I was trying to remember this. I remember days when I worked on road crews and down in pits and ditches and if you don't know, this is cement, it's not pavement, but pavement I've been on before, when it comes out of the dump truck, it's 275 – 300 degrees. Put that on your feet when it is also 80 or 90 or 100 outside. And when there is a breeze or a little shower it's like: I just feel like I've been born again.

Imagine yourself broken down along the highway and you are in a foreign land. You are out west or down south or up north. You don't know anyone. You don't have AAA and someone stops to help you. And you think you died and went to heaven again.

That's what it is like to have God because Ruth looked at this situation in a foreign land and she saw through Naomi God's hand in her life. When you are broken down, when your money is going down and you are having struggles and you are going to the hospital, do you give credit to the world or do you see God in your life? God wants so much to be premier, to be Number One, to be first in every aspect of our life so that others around us can look and say: I want what they have. I've never heard them cut down anyone; I've never heard them gossip; I've never heard them put anyone down; they are always building up.

You know enough, you've heard from your parents: if you have nothing good to say don't what? We're not real good at that. You see, when we have what we have we shouldn't rub our hands and say look what I've earned. We should say I thank God for the blessings that are mine.

What is amazing, those who follow God and those whom God works do great things. Naomi followed God. Because of that, Ruth and Orpah followed God.

Who is watching you today? Who is following God because of you? Are your children seeing it? And grandchildren? When you pull in from church are you cursing at your neighbor because they are mowing the grass? Or do you have some good words? You see, those who

know that we are Christians see our Facebook, they hear our language, they see where we spend our time, they know where we spend our money. They really know where our heart belongs. We either live like we belong to God or we don't and God is saying: I want to be first.

In those days, the scripture still says today you don't pick everything from the fields. We glean in the fall. Why? Because the widows and the orphans and the animals and the birds still need things to eat. We share with our abundance. \

God had made a plan for the widows like Naomi and Ruth and her sister Orpah to make a living and when she was there on that floor trying to get something to eat, this man names Moaz saw her. She was a foreigner in this land. She was humble. He heard the news with his own ears that she honored her mother-in-law and that she cared for her mother-in-law and he came to her, wanting to be her husband because of what he saw. \

You don't realize how much people look at you, how much somebody is depending and hoping they see some hope. So many young people looking to some adult to nurture them, to put their feet on a path, to say there is hope for a future. I'll walk the path with you, I'll even be there. Here was this Ruth clinging, I can just see it, clinging to her mother-in-law, saying: I will never leave you. I don't care where you go, I'll go to your country, I'll stay with you, I will never depart from you.

There are sometimes we think awfully highly of ourselves. I would like to run this by you: Do you see yourself as others see you? Think about that for a moment, when you are ready to rip up somebody else. Do you really think you are as important as you think you are? Do you think other people think that?

I saw a story in the news yesterday. A woman got on a seat and there was a baby on the airplane: I'm not sitting here with this crying baby on the whole flight. I work in the governor's office. I'm thinking people in the governor's office have that kind of power? You think you are better than anyone else?

See, when we start thinking we're better than anybody else, we have a problem. I think it is important that we start to see. One of the things I found in search for this was this: Mirror, Mirror on the wall...do you see Christ in me at all? I never saw this before. I would encourage all of us to put that on our mirrors. Before you are ready to rip into the world around us, how about we become those who uplift and lift up Christ in every single situation we can. Mirror, Mirror on the wall, please let someone see something of Christ in me today. Let someone see something of Christ in me today.

Know that God will make a way. Ruth knew that somehow if she stuck by her mother-in-law Naomi, that if she had that God with her that she was going to make it through because God cares.

1 Peter: Cast your cares on him because He cares for you.

She was a friend of God because she found that relationship through her mother-in-law Naomi who set a path before her saying: I don't know how we are going to get through these tough times, but I know we are going to get through the tough times.

I believe you and I are friends of God and I believe God wants us to have the relationship that others see.

In just a moment we are going to partake of this Holy Communion. It's given to us as a gift by God who says: I loved you so much that my body was broken for you; my body was crucified on the cross for you that you might have new life. What I'm asking of you? Not that kind of sacrifice. I'm asking that you would live for me.

I believe we can do that for God. I believe that we are reminded that forgiveness of our sins and newness of life and a fresh start today, that we can choose to live for God.