

Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17

Psalm 127

Hebrews 9:24-28

Mark 12:38-44

*O God, whose blessed Son came into the world that he might destroy the works of the devil and make us children of God and heirs of eternal life: Grant that, having this hope, we may purify ourselves as he is pure; that, when he comes again with power and great glory, we may be made like him in his eternal and glorious kingdom; where he lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. Amen.*

It's been a roller-coaster of a week! Our first 9 am service here in Immanuel Chapel. What excitement! Then, on Tuesday, the energy and uncertainty of the election. The shooting in Thousand Oaks, where a number of my friends grew up. Events and commemorations around Armistice Day, remembering with grief and thanks the end of the First World War. And for me, the unfolding drama of the fires in California, affecting both friends in Northern California and family in LA. The eventfulness of the week seemed to match well with the dramatic story of Ruth, so let's begin there.

Last week's dramatic declarations at the border of Israel and Moab are behind us. Ruth has kept her promise to follow Naomi "wherever you go", and Naomi has brought them back to Bethlehem, her hometown. But they are both penniless

widows, without support. And “Naomi her mother-in-law said to Ruth, “My daughter, I need to seek some security for you, so that it may be well with you.”

Seek some security. Seek a home.

Home is a place you almost don't think about, when you're a child. It's just -- your place. The place of your people. Your parents, some siblings, maybe a dog; the kitchen table, the yard, the neighbors - they're just your world. You don't choose it; you don't think of it, you just live and grow. It's home. Why would you leave?

My phone rang at 3 am this Friday morning. It was my sister. A fire, near Thousand Oaks, had spread to the hills above where my parents live -- just one town over, so they were evacuating to stay with her in the San Fernando Valley. She just wanted me to know. Ok, I said. I'm glad they can come and be safe with you. Later on Friday I talk to my mom, who describes leaving -- the panic, the air thick with ash, the darkness.

All day, the fire spreads. I follow the news, check Facebook, twitter. I grew up with these news reports -- they're as familiar to me as rain and snow-warnings are here. Strong, dry winds called Santa Anas, carry fire from trees to rooftops. The fire leaps the freeway, making its way into the coastal mountains. Fire whips down steep, narrow canyons, burning its way to the sea. Then my sister starts

texting -- the fire is moving on Malibu, she tells me, where she has taught school for 20 years. Conflicting reports of whether the school is on fire. Students evacuating. Horses and alpacas and peacocks stabled on the beach. Seeing a colleague's house on the news, on fire. Absurdity. Helplessness. Grief. But still, distant. Not quite hitting home.

Then my phone starts vibrating in my lap Friday night, when I'm out with some friends. Again, it's my sister. The fire has spread to the hills near her house in the valley, she said. Voluntary evacuation, she said, but if the wind turns we'll have to go. Tell me what you want me to pack from your room, just in case?

Just like that, with a turn of the wind -- security gone.

"My daughter," Naomi says, "I need to seek some security for you, so that it may be well with you."

Each of our readings today describe people seeking security. The widow at the temple, making her small offering as she came to pray, seeking meaning and connection even in her poverty. The rich worshippers and the scribes, seeking respect and reputation among their people. The community that received Paul's letter to the Hebrews, struggling to navigate between their Jewish and Christian

identities, seeking assurance their sins were forgiven. And Naomi, in her old age, seeking a home for herself and her daughter-in-law, after years in exile.

Naomi and Ruth have been through a lot by the time we encounter them today. As we heard last week, Naomi and her husband Elimelech originally left Bethlehem because of famine. Like the migrants walking north in the caravan, like all those fleeing the wildfires across California, like tens of thousands of people we will never hear of -- Naomi and Elimelech were climate refugees. No one leaves home, after all, unless they have to.

Warsan Shire, a Somali - British poet describes this urgency in her poem, "Home":

no one leaves home unless  
home is the mouth of a shark  
you only run for the border  
when you see the whole city running as well //  
your neighbors running faster than you  
breath bloody in their throats  
the boy you went to school with  
who kissed you dizzy behind the old tin factory  
is holding a gun bigger than his body  
you only leave home  
when home won't let you stay.

Naomi thought she'd found security in Moab. She made a home, bore two sons, saw them married. But then her husband and those sons all died, leaving Naomi and her daughters-in-law without a home. Without security. So she set out, once again, to find some.

Now, whatever you think of Naomi's strategy to bring Ruth to the attention of her kinsman Boaz, you have to admire her shrewdness. Ruth, too, shows admirable strength and nerve, going into the fields to glean and going up the threshing floor to wake Boaz from his sleep. Boaz offers her food, grain, safety, and ultimately marriage. He offers Ruth -- and through Ruth, Naomi -- security.

It's easy to think the story ends there, with Ruth and Boaz happily married, their first child born. But this story isn't a rags-to-riches fairy tale, or a romantic comedy -- it's not the Old Testament version of Cinderella. Even though the book is called the book of "Ruth", it's actually Naomi's story. And it's a story about relationship, about people seeking connection, and how those connections bring about the plan of God.

Naomi returns to Bethlehem, seeking connection, seeking relationship. She is in need, and her people respond. She may be a poor widow, but she is rich in relationship - the women of the town welcome her excitedly back; there are fields for Ruth to glean; her kinsman redeems her. The security in Naomi's life is rooted

in relationship -- with Boaz, with Bethlehem -- and in love. She is blessed by Ruth's love for her; that love is key to her finding herself -- at last-- at home.

I spoke with my sister yesterday afternoon. She told me that they, along with many others, sat at a Starbucks for hours on Friday night, watching the fire burn in the hills, and helicopters and planes drop water to fight the fires. Watching the emergency responders risk their lives for their community. Checking in with friends and co-workers by text. And I'm glad to report that, for now, my family is safe, even though they are not yet home.

The story of these fires isn't over yet. But so far, if you look past the flames and the fear on the news, what I see is a story of community. Over and over, stories of relationship and connectedness springing into view, drawn into focus by the urgency of the situation. Homes abandoned, yes, but pets rescued, rides offered, warnings given, food and shelter provided, people taking refuge with family and friends, or sheltered at local high schools -- cared for during the long hours and days of uncertainty. A network of connectedness and love. Over and over, people saying "it's just stuff. I'm so glad we're safe."

We here at Resurrection know what it's like to leave a home. Know what it's like to set aside that security. Sure, we had more time; we planned to leave; but that doesn't make it any easier. And here we are, in our Moab, ready to follow God in our time away from home.

We know, too, that buildings are "just stuff", that the holy place of God is not "made with human hands." We know that God is present with us, wherever we gather. And we know the strength and the value of relationship. We have committed to care for one another during this time; we pray every week, asking God, "Please keep us together as a church to carry out this offering of love and to continue serving others in your name." I give thanks for this community's willingness to set aside it's material and physical security, and to place it's hope and trust in God. Who knows what God will bring us, in the end?

Look at the end of our reading today. Ruth bears a child, of course -- that's how these Old Testament stories go -- and the women of the village name him Obed. And Obed lives, and and has a son named Jesse, and Jesse has a whole batch of sons, the youngest a fierce, brave shepherd boy, named David. God uses poor widows, uses homeless, foreign immigrant women, to bring Israel a king.

Who knows what God has in store for us? Who knows what events will challenge and surprise us in the months to come? But look around. We are rich in relationship, rich in love. And God is with us, particularly in those relationships, and in the love we will show to each other on the way. May God bless our path together, and our time in this place. And may we all rest in the confidence and trust that our security comes from God.

Amen.