

1 In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. 2 The man's name was Elimelech, his wife's name Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there.

3 Now Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. 4 They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, 5 both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

6 When she heard in Moab that the LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, Naomi and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. 7 With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.

8 Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the LORD show kindness to you, as you have shown to your dead and to me. 9 May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband."

Then she kissed them and they wept aloud 10 and said to her, "We will go back with you to your people."

11 But Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? 12 Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons— 13 would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD's hand has gone out against me!"

14 At this they wept again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-by, but Ruth clung to her.

15 "Look," said Naomi, "your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her."

16 But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. 17 Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me." 18 When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

19 So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem.

If you've seen *Iron Chef America* you know that top chefs from around the country are pitted against each other in a competition that takes place in Kitchen Stadium. In addition to seeing who can prepare the best meal in an hour, the chefs are given a key ingredient they must use in their cuisine. The pressure is on as the minutes tick away and the chefs endeavor to succeed in their challenge.

Today I feel like I'm on an episode of *Iron Preacher America* and our sanctuary is Preaching Stadium. While I don't have a competitor, I have been given not one, but four key ingredients and a time frame in which to deliver a sermon. The ingredients that must be used are this reading from Ruth, the Protestant Reformation, All Saints Day, and Communion. And due to the number of things happening in this morning's service, my time frame is about eight minutes. And so, as the host of *Iron Preacher America* might say just before the clock starts ticking, *Allez Preaching!*

This morning we have the familiar story of Ruth and Naomi. It's interesting that of the very limited amount of art work we have displayed here at the church, a picture of Ruth and Naomi resides in a prominent spot downstairs. I've always found this odd—of all the biblical stories to be portrayed in an artistic rendering in our church, why this one? But I find the picture hanging downstairs no stranger than I find the use of this reading from the Ruth at weddings and on wedding related programs, cards, and even cocktail napkins. *Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.* Now it's a nice sentiment, but it was said not to a wife from a husband in a moment of romance, but rather to a mother-in-law, Naomi, by her daughter-in-law, Ruth, after the former's son, and the latter's husband, died. This does not seem to be the most appropriate sentiment for the celebratory climate of a wedding.

And yet, the statement is one of the most loving and faithful that we find in scripture. In saying it, Ruth reveals her fidelity to, and love for, her mother-in-law who has not had it easy. Years before, Naomi, her husband, and their two sons left their beloved homeland of Bethlehem because of a famine there. They went to Moab and

soon after, Naomi's husband died. Her two sons went on to marry Moabite women but after about ten years, both of her sons died. Now at this point, in that society, Naomi would have had nothing. Without a husband or sons to support her, she was, in a patriarchal society, nothing. She had nothing—no money, no land, no home as women couldn't inherit anything. And she was considered nothing—no husband, no sons, and therefore no status or power. Her only option was to return to her homeland of Bethlehem with the hopes that some other male relative—a brother or nephew perhaps—would take pity on her and offer her food and shelter. And so she released her daughters-in-law from any bonds they had to her—urging them to return to their hometowns. And while one daughter-in-law did just that, the other, Ruth, refused to leave saying, *“do not urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. 17 Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried.”*

Now I have no idea about Ruth's actual size or physical appearance, but what I will say is that she was one big woman. Ruth was big enough to resist the temptation of security and instead, left everything that was familiar and comfortable in order to accompany her mother-in-law back to Bethlehem, a land full of unfamiliar sites, sounds, tastes, people, smells—an unfamiliar God even.

Ruth was big enough—there was space enough within her heart to be courageous and faithful—faithful to her mother-in-law, faithful to her commitments. Her commitment and courage remind me of Martin Luther. Today we remember that day, over 500 years ago, that Martin Luther nailed his 95 complaints against the Catholic Church onto the doors of the cathedral in Wittenberg. At the time, he was not endeavoring to start what would become known as the Protestant Reformation, rather, he was just trying to make the Catholic Church big enough—big enough for lay people to be able to read the Bible for themselves, big enough for the poor to be able to fully participate in the life of the church without having to pay indulgences, big enough for masses to be said in the vernacular so that all people could understand what was being said. He just wanted to stretch the church, challenge the church, reform the church so that it would be big enough for all God's children.

And so it is that on this All Saints Day, Martin Luther is one of the saints of God who I remember with gratitude. Luther was a big enough man to follow God's call and risk life and limb in order to make Christ's church on earth big enough to provide sanctuary to all those who, like Naomi—are without power and voice—a church that is big enough for those whom Jesus called, “the least among you.” And in addition to Luther, there are so many other saints who I, indeed, who we, remember this Sunday; men and women whose love and lives were big enough to encompass ours. Mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, friends, neighbors—the list of big hearted people is big—people who loved us and taught us how big God is—that God is big enough to love us when we're good and when we're bad, when we're successful and when we fail, when we're at top of our game and when we feel like the dirty sock on the bottom of the laundry basket of life, when we're one of the cool kids and when others reject and scorn us. The saints lived big lives—lives that were big enough to mirror and model God's love.

But the one who lived the biggest life was, of course, Jesus our Christ. Jesus' ministry was big enough to include the blind, the lame, the sick, the grieving, the rejected, the poor, even the disbelieving. Jesus was big enough to love them all, to embrace them all, and in the end, Jesus spread his arms big enough to encompass the world as he made the ultimate sacrifice so that all might have life and have it everlasting. Indeed, Jesus is big enough—big enough to love us all. And his table, this table, is big enough to include us all. All of you have a place at this table—at this table where we gather not just with each other—but with the saints who have gone before. And at this table we glance the love, the healing, the wholeness, the communion that will one day be ours when we sit together at the table that Christ lays out before us in the kingdom of God. A table that is big enough for all, hosted by our savior who was big enough to save us all, given to us by a God who is big enough—big enough. Thanks be to God, big enough.