For All the Saints
Ruth 1: 16 – 22
A sermon by Rev. Dr. David Clark
Bay Shore Community Congregational Church – November 1, 2026

Halloween and All Saints

I always love the folks who go all out for Halloween. Some make a whole month out of it. Or two. Elaborate decorations, jack-o-lanterns, costumes, parties. It's fun. In Des Moines, Iowa, the tradition is for trick-or-treaters to tell a joke to get candy. It's adorable to see a four-year-old telling a joke they may or may not entirely understand. How did the frog cross the road? He rode a chicken.

All the fun of Halloween, including the lampooning of what frightens us, is part of the All Saints' commemoration we celebrate today. Just a reminder that Halloween means All Hallows' Eve. Hallowed means holy; we remember those who have entered their holy rest in God. It's part of Halloween in that the death we fear loses its sting because we know it is not the end.

In our tradition, saints aren't just the nearly perfect people. They are any who has brought God's blessings of love and kindness into our lives. It's important that we set aside special times to remember and give thanks for these people, so that we will remember to pay those blessings forward to others.

Which is why we're looking at the Old Testament's story of Ruth. She was an ordinary person. She wasn't a prophet or priest or general who commanded armies to stunning victory. She didn't perform miracles like calling fire down from the sky. She was an impoverished widow from a hated foreign country whose loving-kindness made all the difference in the world to another impoverished widow. And for that, she is one of the two women to whom a whole book of the Bible is devoted to remembering and celebrating her legacy.

Ruth's Story

A few weeks ago, Rev. Libby Tigner spoke briefly about Ruth and the other women in Jesus' genealogy. A quick recap of the story is in order.

The story starts with a woman named Naomi (which means pleasant). When a famine hit Israel, she and her husband left for the territory of Moab. This was despite the Moabites being bitter rivals and often enemies of the Israelites. But their desperation for food drove them. They settled in and had two sons. But the husband dies. The sons grow up, get married, but something happened, and both the sons died, too.

Naomi is bereft and decides returning to Israel will soothe her soul. She looks at her two widowed daughters-in-law; tells them she is leaving and gives her blessing for them to find new husbands and have full, happy lives. One of the daughters-in-law says that sounds good. But the other, Ruth, says no way. I'm not letting you go by yourself. I'm coming with you. Where you go, I will go; your people will be my people.

Withersoever

I like the way the old King James Version of the Bible phrases it. "Withersoever thou goest, I will go." Withersoever is a great word. Decades ago, this was quoted in wedding liturgies. Withersoever. I'm in it with you no matter what may befall.

Nowadays we cover it with "For better, for worse." A few weeks ago, when Dayna had her accident and we didn't know if she'd regain use of her legs or hands, withersoever was the word that kept coming to mind. We're partners in this no matter what. Withersoever. A person's character is defined by what we commit ourselves to. May we always be appreciative and thank God for those who have stuck with us in the hard times.

From Pleasant to Bitter

Withersoever wasn't an easy declaration for Ruth because Naomi wasn't an easy person. When they got back to the little town of Bethlehem, Naomi announced that she was changing her name to Mara, which means "bitter." She was bitter that God had abandoned her and let such tragedies come to her. She went from pleasant Naomi to bitter Mara. In my experience, bitter people aren't much fun to be around. It's a constant chore. It's a shame that she was so focused on the negative that she couldn't see that God was working through Ruth to take care of her. She wasn't abandoned, but she couldn't see it. That is always the temptation, isn't it? Instead of focusing on what didn't work out, it's sometimes hard to see that God is with us—withersoever.

God not only worked through Ruth, but also the community who made sure they had food on the table. And God worked through a man named Boaz who married Ruth and took them in. Their child would become the grandfather to King David and an ancestor of Jesus. Without the Ruth story, there wouldn't be a Jesus story a thousand years later.

Somebody in the ancient world made sure Ruth's story was in the Bible. Whenever people said, "We should have nothing to do with foreigners," someone could answer, "Remember Ruth." The book is a quiet check against that kind of thinking. It asks

us to remember who we owe our existence to, which is often someone nobody expected.

The story is never about a supernatural event. It is about what happens after the ordinary, faithful act of a person who didn't have to do it. It ripples out through generations, and the ripple reaches us. A long line of ordinary, flawed people made sure we got here. And so we celebrate them today. I wonder who is on your list; who are you grateful for?

Three Saints we Honor Today

Today we lit candles for three people from our church who died last year, who all made tremendous differences and sacrifices for the church and people they loved. Ordinary people whom God worked through to bless us.

Sandy Dysart, who was such a kind, joyful soul, whose grandchildren movingly bore witness to her compassion and commitment to them. Her career was as a hospice social worker who helped people navigate their last days and resourced their families in the grief journey. She had this infectious belief that the God who loves us in this life takes care of us in the next.

John Pohorsky, who in so many ways was a caretaker of his loved ones and the church: the building, the people, especially the pastors. As an usher, he made people feel welcome and appreciated with a smile and the best loud laugh I ever heard.

One of the people who made him laugh was Jerry Whitacre, who used to tell John, "If I knew you were going to be here, I wouldn't have come." They enjoyed the give and take. Jerry was a pharmacist who gently helped people with their health care, and his family members took after him, entering the profession to honor his sweet, loving spirit.

Carrying the Legacy

As I look at the candles we lit, I'm so grateful to think their light burns on. With God, and also within us. Our saints aren't perfect, but they made an impact in shaping our lives.

The goodness we received isn't ours to keep, but to share. If someone was generous to you, be generous to someone else. If someone showed up for you in a hard time, show up for someone else. If someone showed you the difference faith can make it navigating the better and worses of life, live into that faith in a way that inspires others.

Ruth never knew that she would get a book of the Bible named after her or that she would be part of the Jesus story. We never know all the ways the ripples of our kindness, our love, our service will extend beyond our earthly days.

So on this Halloween/All Saints weekend, let us not be afraid to live boldly and make a difference.

We need not fear because God and this church community are with you whithersoever.