

St. John the Evangelist Episcopal Church
Formation in Faith Lectionary
2017

November 5

Faithfulness of Ruth

Ruth 1:1-18

At Mt. Sinai, Israel had made a special commitment to God. Yet even after the twelve tribes settled in the Promise Land, it was hard to live up to that covenant promise. Surrounded by hostile tribes, the Israelites often tried to remain separate from their neighbors in order to remain a special covenant people. In the midst of all of this turmoil, we encounter the story of Ruth, and a reminder of a different part of Israel's call. God's people are to be faithful to the covenant, but are also to be a beacon to the world. Ruth's commitment to Naomi shows that love and faithfulness can transcend ethnicity and nationality.

Questions for Discussion:

Naomi and her husband had moved to neighboring Moab, where their sons had married foreign women. The Old Testament scriptures often condemn Israelite men for taking foreign wives, since these women often had their own gods. Yet we learn after this story that Ruth becomes the great grandmother of King David, and indeed of Jesus. What does this story say to us about foreign wives like Ruth?

Naomi seems angry with God after her husband and her sons die, saying that "the Lord has turned against me." Have you ever felt angry at God? Have you ever felt that God abandoned you?

Naomi tells her daughters-in-law to go home to their own country. Orpah obeys her, but Ruth chooses to stay with Naomi. Why do you think Orpah made the choice she did? Would you have wanted to go home to your own country? Why do you think Ruth makes the choice that she does?

Ruth makes a beautiful statement of love and commitment to Naomi, saying "I will never leave you," and "your God will be my God." Think about your relationship with your parents and other family and friends. What kind of commitment have you made to them?

November 12

Anointing of David

1 Samuel 16:1-13

In the wake of settling in the Promised Land, things had not always gone well or peacefully for the tribes of Israel. While at first they had been ruled by a series of wise judges, after a while the Israelites began wanting a king. After the failure of the first king of Israel, King Saul, God decides to anoint a new king. Sending the prophet Samuel to the house of Eli in Bethlehem, God shows that what people see in a leader is not always what God sees.

Questions for Discussion:

When God tells Samuel to go to Bethlehem, at first he is afraid. When Samuel shows up in Bethlehem the townspeople are afraid. Why do think they all might be frightened? If Saul is still king, what does it mean to be anointing a new king in his place?

In Bethlehem, Samuel visits the house of Ruth's grandson Jesse, and is told to seek a new king among Jesse's sons. As each of Jesse's sons pass by, Samuel seems to think that each must be the one, but God is looking for something else. What do we look for in a leader, a teacher, or even in our friends? Do we look at outward appearances, or do we look at the heart?

God tells Samuel not to pick the oldest, the tallest, or the strongest of Jesse's sons, but has him pick David, the smallest and the youngest. What do you think it means that God picks the youngest? Does God care only for the strongest and best, or for the weak and the small? How can we show we care for those that other people may overlook?

Samuel crowns David king by anointing him with oil. Are there times when people are anointed with oil in church? Do you think there is a connection between the royal anointing and the chrism oil marked on us at baptism?

This story tells us the great king of Israel was a humble boy from the humble town of Bethlehem. Who else do we know who was born in Bethlehem?

November 19

Elijah on Mt. Carmel

1 Kings 18:17-39

Only a few generations after King David, his kingdom split into the northern Kingdom of Israel and the southern Kingdom of Judah. Though David proved to be a good ruler, many of the kings who came after him were not as faithful to the people or to God. King Ahab of Israel and his wife Jezebel had begun worshipping the pagan gods Ba'al and Asherah. While Ruth shows us that foreigners could come to faith in God, Ahab shows how it was always tempting for the Israelites to abandon faith in God for the worship of foreign gods. Yet God does not give up on Israel, sending the prophet Elijah, with a call to return to covenant faith.

Questions for Discussion:

Ahab calls Elijah the “troubler of Israel.” Why do you think King Ahab may have been afraid of Elijah’s visit? How would you feel as Elijah, being asked to confront the king on his unfaithfulness? What gives Elijah the courage to speak the truth to the king?

King Ahab and the people of Israel were divided between their loyalties to God, and their desire to gain favor with other pagan gods. What is there in our lives that divide our attention from God? Are there other things in our lives that distract us from being faithful to God?

Elijah takes the prophets of Ba'al up to Mount Carmel, one of the highest mountains in Israel to put them to the test. One prophet of God, Elijah, against 450 prophets of Ba'al. Elijah also makes sure that his test is harder, having water poured three times over his sacrifice. What do you think this says about Elijah’s confidence in God? What does this say about God versus the other distractions in our lives?

God performs a miracle on Mount Carmel proving that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is the true God, and that Ba'al and Asherah are false idols. People often ask for signs of God’s presence and favor. What signs are there in your life that God loves you and is with you? This Thanksgiving, what are you thankful for in your life?

November 26

Courage in Exile

Daniel 3:8-30

A few centuries after King David, both kingdoms were invaded and destroyed. In the year 597 BC, the Babylonians captured Jerusalem, destroyed the temple, and carried many of the Jewish people into exile far away in the city of Babylon. There they were forced to adopt Babylonian ways and worship Babylonian gods. They were even forced to bow down and worship the Babylonian ruler, King Nebuchadnezzar, as a god. The Book of Daniel tells of how, in the midst of this time of exile, three Jewish men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to abandon God, and how God refused to abandon them.

Questions for Discussion:

This passage tells us that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had been high officials, “appointed over the affairs of the province of Babylon.” Why do you think their power did not save them from the accusations?

King Nebuchadnezzar orders them to bow down to his statue at the playing of the instruments, on threat of death, being thrown into a fiery furnace. In many parts of our world today, Christians are threatened with death for being faithful to Jesus. How would you feel if your faith were threatened? What does our world tell us to worship instead of God and how are we threatened if we disobey? Are we brave enough to stand?

The three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, are thrown into the fiery furnace, but the king says he can see four men walking in the midst of the furnace, and that the fourth man has the appearance of a god. What do you think this means? Was God with the men in furnace? Have there been hard times in your life when you have felt God with you? How has God’s presence made you feel as you face those trials?

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego come through the fire unharmed. What is the result of their faithfulness to God? What does this say about the power of a courageous stand for faith?