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 SERMON TITLE: Going Home to Hope
 SCRIPTURE: The Book of Ruth
 DATE: November 21, 2021

Online service at www.fpccd.org/live-stream

“We pray for blessings. We pray for peace—*comfort, protection, healing, prosperity.*” How do we receive those precious helps in this world of suffering?

Laura Story, the writer of the praise song “Blessings” asks, “What if your blessings come through raindrops, what if your healing comes through tears? What if a thousand sleepless nights are what it takes to know you’re near to God? What if the trials of this life are His mercies in disguise?”

Did you notice God’s mercies throughout Naomi’s story?

Sad Naomi. Dejected Naomi. Empty Naomi; she defined herself by loneliness and loss in her older years. God’s got a lot to do to get her to a place of JOY!

Did you sense God’s presence in Naomi’s story?

Laura Story’s song declares: “We pray for wisdom, Your voice to hear; And we cry in anger when we cannot feel You near.” Can we, in the midst of struggle, learn to see God at work?

Sorrow turns us to seek God, even when we say:
 “We doubt Your goodness, we doubt Your love,
 As if every promise from Your Word is not enough.”

But all the while, in our sorrow God still hears. And, all the while, even when we don’t know it, God is at work. When Naomi lost her husband, God knew. When Naomi’s sons died, God saw.

When “*Naomi decided to go home*” God was aware. Perhaps God even directed her, putting a little wish in her thoughts or a longing in her heart to be with people who were familiar—to go home.

Let us, like Naomi, come home to our God during this season. Let us be together as the church. When she did return home the entire city welcomed the two widows with open arms. *Did you notice?*

Did you notice:

- ✓ The harvesters left plenty of grain for Ruth.
- ✓ The owner, Boaz, instructed them to do even more.

- ✓ Boaz encouraged Ruth to stay in his field and ordered the young men not to bother her.
- ✓ He offered her food and drink.
- ✓ He blessed her for her devotion to Naomi.
- ✓ He heaped up grain for her.

These are unexpected but much needed blessings! Have you been blessed during your trials? Have you blessed someone else in their trials?

Naomi was living in defeat—“Call me bitter” she said.

But through these blessings God is drawing her out of bitterness. God longs for us to have faith to believe; to turn to God at all times. Even so, God waits for us and moves with us.

Have you noticed God moving in your family? Look for little kindnesses.

The interesting thing is that your faith influences others. You influence your children, your nieces and nephews, your grandchildren and friends.

And, you are influenced by their faith—or lack thereof.

Naomi, sad though she was, influenced Ruth so much that Ruth accepted Naomi’s God. Ruth not only devoted herself to her mother-in-law, but adopted her faith! They were going home to hope.

They were able to settle there. So how do we know God was at work?

When they settled in, notice the words, “*As it so happened.*” Ruth ended up in a rich relative’s field. Notice the words, “*Boaz just happened to be there when she was gleaning.*” Notice, “*Boaz was generous and kind.*” What is the source of all these coincidences?

Ruth was not raised with knowing God. But Naomi was. She heard the famine was over in Bethlehem and credited it not as chance, but as God’s blessing. She moved toward God’s blessing.

Do you move toward God’s blessing? You can find it in the midst of sorrow—with God there’s always something more; something magnificent and bigger than life!

Naomi’s blessings were coming when the deaths of her husband and sons were hard to take.

Here's her state of mind.

- She had gone away to Moab full; *she had all she wanted once*—
- She returns empty—and *it's all gone*.

She was Naomi (*pleasant*)—and now she's Mara (*bitter*).

What would she do? Return home, which to her was to “seek God.”

It's like Scarlett O'Hara after Rhett Butler dumped her. “I'll go home to Tara, for tomorrow's another day!” Home gave her hope.

What do you think of as home?

Home to her was a spiritual place and a physical place. Remember? She heard God blessed her hometown with a good harvest! That's an act of the spiritual. The townspeople embraced and provided for her. That's physical.

That's what the Bible says the church is to do: Love God and love people. The love of the church is the spiritual realm which overflows into everyday life and brings peace, comfort, protection, healing, and prosperity.

Today begins our gathering together as the church to enjoy a Thanksgiving meal. God is fully a part of this thankfulness and so are we. We make the meal. But God brings us through hardships to hope. Naomi needed the church family to come home to and be restored.

The ministry of the church is very much needed. When you support the work of this church, you offer very real care to one another and to the community around you. Malachi 3:10 says,

“Bring the full tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in my house, and thus put me to the test, says the LORD of hosts; see if I will not open the windows of heaven for you and pour down for you an overflowing blessing.”

Notice, the church provided not just worship (spiritual nurture) but also food (practical help).

But, God had even more in mind for these two women.

Do you think God can move people into the right place to create a future for us? Malachi 4:2 says:

“For you who revere my name the sun of righteousness shall rise, with healing in its wings. You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall.”

These women had nothing. But God was way ahead of them. God regained their original farm property, provided a husband for Ruth, and give them a baby—a grandchild! Who could imagine the joy for Naomi!

How did this happen?

Naomi lost everything, had nothing, and from her faith and the faithfulness of God, she gained everything!

Ruth lost everything, but gained God—and much more: a husband who loved and provided for her, and gave her a little son.

All of this happened in the midst of a loving, believing, God-following, generous, caring community of faith.

What kind of community do we want to be at First Presbyterian Church? Are we a people who think the spiritual realm is oh so important? Do we think that God can overcome anything—even those things we ourselves cannot overcome? Who do we look to for wisdom?

“We pray for blessings. We pray for peace—we seek *comfort, protection, healing, and prosperity*.” From whom do we receive those precious helps in this world of suffering? Let us find them here. Let us be these blessings to others right here.

AMEN