

Sermon 120615 Church
Scripture Ruth 1: 16-17
Sermon Title When Church Is Family

I had planned to give a second Sunday in Advent sermon today, but an experience here in worship two weeks ago was so compelling, I decided to preach on it.

If you were here you remember it. If you weren't here, let me tell you about it. It was the Sunday before Thanksgiving. Our Confirmands had already left for the Mosque visit. I had a nice little Thanksgiving message ready and we were in Celebrations and Concerns. I started with prayers for Roy Auguston who was facing bypass surgery that Wednesday, which Roy is now recovering well from.

I called on Lu Post first. If you don't know Lu, she is a true gift to our church. She, with me, is a Stephan Leader in our Stephan Ministry program. Lu has really taken the lead on Stephan Ministry as I've had a few other things to tend to as pastor. Lu has served on many committees and is in our choir.

As a member of our choir, she sings side by side with her sister, Jamie. Jamie is currently a Stephan Minister and a Deacon. These two women have a big hand in making Union Church the special place that it is.

Jamie and Lu were in Jamaica a few weeks earlier to witness and celebrate Jamie's son's wedding. Since back, Jamie had been suffering from vertigo. Jamie is a two-time cancer survivor.

So, when I called on Lu in Celebrations and Concerns, she stood up and through tears told the congregation that Jamie had gone to the hospital where they found a mass in Jamie's brain. Lu said that Jamie had been moved to Brigham and Woman's Hospital and was undergoing emergency brain surgery that day.

In maybe the most courageous and heartfelt extemporaneous talk I have ever heard, Lu through many tears spoke of Jamie's love for our church and the people in it.

There is a cliché that goes, "There wasn't a dry eye in the house." Well, it was true of Union Church that day. If you didn't have tears you had a surely lump in your throat. Personally, I was a mess for the rest of worship. Jamie is one of those special people who touch your heart and she doesn't even need to speak. I have said more than once what an inspiration she is.

Well, there were tears being wiped all over the church for the rest of worship. We were ONE in a deep and moving way. Parnell, on the fly, changed the music from upbeat Thanksgiving music to the solemn mood we were all feeling.

Union Church is not a hugging church. It is a handshake church. There is a hand full of folks that regularly hug me when

leaving the sanctuary. That day, most women and many men hugged me leaving the sanctuary. It was a day that we all needed hugs.

It is a fascinating for someone like me to hear why people come to church. Many come to see their friends. Many like the music. Some want to be reminded of how to be a good person. Some want to develop a better relationship with the Lord. Believe it or not, some people actually look forward to the sermons.

I'll pretty much guarantee that nobody comes to church to have experiences like we had two weeks ago. I've come to worship many, many times in my life both as a congregant and as a pastor and I've never experienced anything like that.

I was on the phone with Bill Driscoll, one of our lead Deacons that afternoon. He told me that after he, the Deacons, and some others decorated the church for the season, he went home to Donna. They were talking about the extraordinary worship service and he said, "How do people who don't have church handle situations like that?"

Bill is right on target. Church is a lot of things to different people, but more than anything, it is a place to be held. It is a place to be loved and to love. Where there is love there is God.

That is, I believe, what happened two weeks ago. The Holy Spirit moved here in beautiful and mysterious ways. As much pain

and worry that we were in as a group, Holy Spirit move here that day. The Spirit moved in Lu and her extraordinary witnessing of love for her sister. It moved in all of us in our love for Lu and Jamie. The Holy Spirit moved in Jamie. I visited Jamie the next day at the Brigham and she told me that when she was going through the terror of the hospital experience thinking that she can't do this again, she was suddenly overwhelmed with the feeling of how much she is loved.

The Holy Spirit moved in Whitney, who is new to us, and is going through terrible illness in her family. Whitney contacted Meg and me to tell us that she is praying for the woman having emergency brain surgery.

There is so much about God that is a mystery to us. We can never understand God. But what we can do is be touched by God if we are open to be touched by God. It is true that church is not the only place to experience God, not by a long shot. But I am suggesting to you that church is the only place that we can be moved by the love of two sisters and we who love them and that it is safe for that love expressed in such a way. Where there is love there is God.

Why do people come to church? Well we've listed some reasons. But there is so much more to be experienced here... so much more.

I have been trying to capture in words what we experienced that day and realize that I can't. All I can say is that we are closer today as Union Church, the church of Jesus Christ than when we started worship two weeks ago and for that I thank God. AMEN