

**SERMON PREACHED BY  
REV. JAN CRAIG  
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**“Be My People”**

**Readings:** Ruth 1:1-18  
Mark 12:28-34

A few years ago someone forwarded an email to me and I stuck it in a file. This week I went looking for it. It contains a short quiz. Are you ready for this?

“Take a few moments to think about your answers to the following questions:

1. Name the five wealthiest people in the world.
2. Name the last five Moderators of the United Church of Canada.
3. Name ten people who have won the Nobel or Pulitzer Prize.
4. Name the last half dozen Academy Award winners for Best Actor and Actress.
5. Name the last decade’s worth of World Series Winners.

Well – how did you do? If you are like most people you can only fill in a few blanks here and there, but usually you can’t remember who did what or who won what. The point is, most of us don’t remember the headliners of yesterday. These are not second-rate achievers – they are all at the top of their fields. We admire them greatly but we still can’t remember who they are. Their achievements are forgotten.

Now here is another quiz:

1. List a few teachers who aided your journey through school.
2. Name three friends who have helped you through a difficult time.
3. Name five people who have taught you something worthwhile.
4. Think of a few people who have made you feel appreciated and special.
5. Think of five people you enjoy spending time with.
6. Name a half dozen non-celebrity heroes whose stories have inspired you?

Was that easier? We have no problem remembering the people who have helped to shape us. We remember those who have inspired us and encouraged us. These are the ones we talk about, hold close to our hearts, give thanks for and truly value. The people who make a difference in our lives are not the ones with credentials or awards or money but they are the ones with value, the ones who care. In most cases, besides admiring some of the greats like Mother Theresa or Ghandi or Martin Luther King, the person we name as saint is someone unknown to most of the world, who just quietly but profoundly touches our lives in some way that changes us and makes a difference in who we really are today.

Today we heard the story of Naomi and her daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah. Life had been so bittersweet for Naomi who had left Bethlehem with her husband and her sons to make a better life. Now they were all dead and there she was with her two daughters-in-law feeling lost in a strange land and believing that she was called to go home. One daughter-in-law, Orpah, was persuaded to stay behind and return to her family, but Ruth, she wanted to stay with Naomi. She was ready to leave her homeland and to make a new start just to be with Naomi. For her, Naomi was a saint and she was not willing to be parted from this woman who had transformed her life in such a radical way. Both women suffered a great personal loss – for one the loss of a mother figure and for the other the loss of a future in her homeland. It was not an easy decision for either woman.

This month we are being challenged to think about our stewardship of resources. We are being asked to be honest with ourselves about the use of our own resources. About the use of our time, our talent and our financial resources. Being part of a community is like being in any relationship – it depends on the give-and-take of those involved. Jesus speaks to us today about loving God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and then goes on to say that we are called to love our neighbour as we love ourselves. That is an incredibly high calling. Not one that sits lightly or easily on our ears, let alone on our shoulders (or our wallets).

But as we look at the incredible legacy of gifts that is spread around us and before us today we cannot help but be humbled by the gifts and givers who have gone before us.

Those folks who have called Scarboro United their church home and have given to it deeply and graciously in both life and death. Given of their time and of their gifts of leadership and care and friendship and also of their financial gifts. (shout out the names) The thing is ... as many of you hear the names or think of them what you remember are the many ways they touched your own lives for they are the saints of your lives and the saints of this congregation. Today we celebrate their lives and the gifts they gave.

Today we also look to the future. When I was invited to come and join you here for a few months this year I need to tell you that I really did not hesitate – except to think about all the novels I would not get to read. The reason I did not hesitate is because of some of the “saints” of Scarboro. Even while I was growing up in Edmonton and attending CGIT, somehow Scarboro was a church that I was aware of. I remember the young woman who attended CGIT Camp Council the year I did in the early 60’s from Scarboro. Her name was Janet Foster. I attended weddings here. I co-officiated at a wedding with Tom Bray while I was still in ministry in Ottawa. And then when I returned here to serve at Parkdale United Church it was Tom Bray who was the Presbytery Representative on the committee that called me and since then my paths crossed often with folk from Scarboro. I met and appreciated the ministry and the contribution of this congregation and I came to know Judy and enjoyed once again being a colleague of Bill and valued his wisdom many times. This place became one of those places that I thought “I would like to be in ministry with those folk.” Never thinking that would happen but as in any profession you look at positions and think “that would be a good one”. And this was one of those places to me.

I cared about here because I believe you have offered much to the people of Scarboro and much to the people of Calgary for 80 years now. And I believe you have much to offer in the future. You have many “saints” who have created and continue to create this place. This place has been created out of many decisions and relationships; out of days and years of simply doing and being; out of reaching into pockets and writing cheques; out of remembering the church in life and in death so that this place could stand and serve anyone who needed it to be here. This congregation began 80 years ago just as the great depression began - just as the stock markets collapsed. What an incredible time for the opening of a church - what a beacon of hope this place must have been to people in a dark and uncertain time. And what a legacy for you as a congregation to be continuing as these years unfold. There is much to be remembered and to be talked about and carried forth into your future.

So what is it about someone that makes them a “saint” for us. I think they believe in us and want the best for us. Saints are not perfect and they do not ask anyone else to be perfect – saints know how to ask for forgiveness and how to offer it to others. Saints believe that anything is possible and are willing to work to make things happen. Saints have a sense of humour about themselves and about the world around them. Saints have lived life and known both joy and loss, both the coming to birth and the dying part of living and have found a way to live life fully in both laughter and tears. Saints share life and touch others’ lives and don’t back away from relationships.

Saints are those who say to us “Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people will be my people and your God will be my God.” Those were the words that Ruth said to Naomi and I know they were read at weddings for many years, but I believe they are words that are bigger than that too. They are words that set the stage for the story of human risk-taking and divine purpose. For both Naomi and Ruth prove to be resourceful and gutsy – as Orpah was wise and sensible. Ruth, in the end would become the grandmother of David and an ancestor of Jesus. God does indeed work in mysterious ways using human courage and trust in God as both necessary components to bring God’s vision into reality.

I don’t know what your vision will be for Scarboro in the next five or ten years – I do know that some of it is emerging now and I do know that it will take both human courage and trust in God to get you to where you want to be. It will take traveling together as you move to some new lands. It will mean sticking together and saying to one another “Will you be my people? I will be yours. This is my covenant.” That has been the promise of people here for 80 years of living and growing and changing -- may it be yours too. The Promised Land is before you too.

Amen