

**VOCATION**  
Randall Tremba  
November 1, 2015  
All Saints' Day  
Shepherdstown Presbyterian Church

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**Ruth 1:1-18**

*Ruth said, "Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die—there will I be buried. May the LORD do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!" When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.*

**Mark 12:28-34**

*One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that he answered them well, he asked him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."*

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Last Sunday evening 30 some high school students from the various churches of Shepherdstown gathered for dinner and a program at Shepherd University. That number included eight of our own. Many of the students were surprised to discover that their schoolmates were also church kids.

The program addressed "Life Beyond High School." Twenty parents attended as well. Rev. Dee Ann Dixon, pastor at New. St. United Methodist Church offered a blessing for the meal. Fr. Mat of St. Agnes Catholic Church offered a closing benediction.

Before dinner, four recent college students spoke about their experiences. They shared good times and hard times from their college days. They told of regrets and great opportunities. Many practical tips were offered, including our own Eric Smith's advice: "Don't worry too much; things will work out as long as you wake up and go to class."

Following dinner three people, including our own Mark Madison, spoke about their jobs and careers and how they figured out what to do with their lives. Margaret Cogswell told about her work with hospice, an interest prompted in part by the early death of her father. She is now CEO of the Hospice of the Panhandle.

David Gross, who is wheel chair bound, told of his career in sales with AT&T and about his second career now as teacher at Shepherd in business and finance. He touted the value of business and businesses.

Mark Madison told of his early interest in the natural world, especially evolutionary biology and how it led to studies in Australia and from there to his current position as historian at NCTC (National Conservation Training Center).

Many wholesome and sparkling seeds were planted that night. Seeds that may lie dormant for a while, but could eventually blossom.

The emcee also challenged the youth to live up to their vocation as baptized children of the church. Vocation comes from same word as "voice," he said. "In your baptism you are called to love God and others wholeheartedly. No matter what job or career you

undertake, whether you remain single or marry, whether you are rich or poor, your primary vocation remains the same: to love God and others wholeheartedly.”

It was a clear and direct challenge to those *reluctantly Christian* students to practice compassion. Remember who you are and what you are meant to do and be. You are not called to be consumers. You are not called to be cool. You are not called to be successful. You are called to be faithful servants of love.

I couldn't have said it better myself. Oh, wait, I did say that myself. I was the emcee.

What is the greatest commandment, Jesus was once asked. Love God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength, he answered. And the second is like it: love your neighbor as you love yourself. There is nothing greater than these, he said. And it's true; there is nothing greater than these two great invitations and possibilities.

And that's why we can't help ourselves from caring for the migrants seeking safety in Europe. It's why a group of us will meet again today to explore how we might settle a Syrian refugee family or two in our community. It's not everything; but it's something.

It's why the children of the church will assemble school kits next Sunday for CWS (Church World Service) to distribute to children in refugee camps. It's not everything; but it's something.

It's why you contributed \$2,400 of your hard earned money to the October Peacemaking Offering to send through our Presbyterian partners for refugee assistance. It's not everything; but it's something.

Love God and others wholeheartedly. That's our vocation. And so we can't help ourselves from being compassionate to migrants and refugees.

It's why Sky Benedict one of the children of this church is now devoting himself to Arabic studies at Georgetown University. He wants to alleviate the refugee crisis. His mother told me last week that Sky found his vocation here in church. It's now just a question of what form it will take.

Jesus was nurtured in a tradition sympathetic to the plight of migrants and refugees. His mother and father had fled to Egypt for safety soon after his birth. His great, great, great (I don't know how many greats to add) grandmother Ruth once embraced a despondent refugee and escorted her home.

That story is the Old Testament lesson for today.

Once upon a time, nearly 1000 years before the birth of Jesus, a man named Elimelech, his wife Naomi and their two sons fled their native land in search of safety and food. Their native land, the so-called Promise Land, was stricken by famine. They straggled across the Jordan River and into the land of Moab—migrants in search of food and shelter among a people, the Moabites, they had been taught to hate and fear. The Moabites were of no count, they were infidels and outside the blessed and chosen people.

But the Moabites had food.

Elimelech and Naomi were welcomed by the Moabites. They survived and thrived. Against their own people's taboos, their sons married Moabite women. For a while it was one happy family and then tragedy struck. Naomi's husband died, and soon thereafter both her sons.

Naomi was crushed, sickened and broken by grief. Call me Naomi no longer, she said; call me Mara. Naomi means pleasant. Mara means bitter. Do not call me Naomi. Call me

Mara. Her joy and hope had died. She would now head home alone to her native land to live out her bitter years.

Go back to your father's home, she told her two daughters-in-law. You have no hope with me. One daughter kissed her goodbye and went home.

But the other, Ruth, whose name means "friend," said. *"Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die and there will I be buried. May the LORD do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!"*

Here I am. Your friend.

Ruth and Naomi crossed over the Jordan River into Judea. They were women with no security. Their future was bleak, uncertain and full of risks. The terrain ahead was dangerous. But they were together, walking together and holding hands.

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HYMN  
"Here I Am, Lord"