At Home in Bethlehem

Week 1: Ruth - "Facing a Bitter Harvest" Ruth 1:6-22

1. **Home:** The sermon opens with Christmas movies that center on home. What does "home" mean to you, and how has that meaning changed over your lifetime?

2. **Famine and leaving:** Elimelech left Bethlehem, the "House of Bread," because of famine. When have hard circumstances pushed you to leave a place, a job, or a season of life? What did you find there?

3. **Bitterness:** Naomi concludes, "The Lord's hand has gone out against me." Why is it so tempting to blame God when we suffer? What does that blame do to us?

4. **Symptoms:** The sermon lists signs of hopelessness, such as sarcasm, a sour attitude, and a desire to be left alone in self-pity. Which of these have you seen in yourself or noticed in others? What helped?

5. **Pushing people away:** Naomi repeatedly tells Ruth and Orpah to go back. Why do hurting people so often push away those who offer comfort? How can we stay close to someone who is doing that?

6. **Ruth's commitment:** Ruth says, "Where you go I will go... Your people will be my people and your God my God." What does her loyalty show about love and hope? Who has been a "Ruth" to you?

7. **Seeing God at work:** Naomi couldn't see God working through Ruth because bitterness blocked her vision. Looking back, when did you realize God had been at work in a way you couldn't see at the time?

8. **Naming our pain:** Naomi asks to be called "Mara" (Bitter). Is it healthy or unhealthy to name our pain honestly before God? How do the Psalms or other Scriptures shape your answer?

9. **Being hope for others:** The sermon challenges us to be a Ruth for another Naomi. Who in your life is looking for hope this Advent?

10. What is one concrete step you could take to share hope this week?