



One of my favorite musicals is Come From Away.

I've seen it twice in the last month –

once in Oregon and once in Albuquerque –

and I saw it at Popejoy when it played here years ago.

The musical is about the town of Gander in Newfoundland, and the incredible hospitality they offered complete strangers on September 11, 2001.

The town of Gander had a huge airport, leftover from the time when nearly every trans-Atlantic flight had to stop there to refuel.

On September 11, when the United States air space was suddenly closed, 38 planes were diverted to land in Gander.

For three days, a town with a population of less than 10,000 and neighboring smaller towns hosted nearly 7,000 “plane people,” providing food, shelter, and access to phone and internet.

Residents welcomed strangers into their homes for showers.

Stores told the volunteers and the visitors to take what they needed from the shelves at no charge.

The musical has made me cry every time I've seen it, and I tear up just listening to the music in my car.

In one part of the musical, one of the plane people remembers a song from growing up in the church, and others visit the church in town, and they sing “*Make me a channel of your peace – where there is hatred let me bring your love . . .*”

That song is interwoven with a prayer sung by the rabbi who was traveling to NYC, and with the prayer of a Muslim man, and it is beautiful.

And a beautiful reminder of how hospitality is a part of the faith we share, part of following the God who always asks us to treat one another with compassion and welcome strangers.

In a climate as harsh as Newfoundland, the practice of hospitality and care for community is a matter of survival.

On September 11, that community was called on to practice their hospitality for strangers from around the world –

strangers who, in 3 very long days, become neighbors and friends. In a time of great crisis and grief, the practice of hospitality and compassion was healing and life-giving for both the residents of Gander and the ones who had “come from away.”



Today we are beginning a series of sermons, worship and adult formation focusing on our lives of faith as a journey.

The theme today and next Sunday is Journey to Community – how we come together as people of faith to care for one another and support one another in our shared journey of faith.

Today we consider especially the role of community in the face of hardship and tragedy and need.

The story of Ruth and Naomi begins with multiple crises – a famine in Bethlehem, and the death of Naomi’s husband and sons, Ruth’s husband.

It is a story about welcoming the stranger; Elimilech and Naomi are welcomed into a new life in Moab, and then the Moabite Ruth is welcomed by the community in Bethlehem.

Ruth makes a commitment to Naomi to accompany her to her home, and to be her family in this new life the two widows will share there.

Out of their commitment to care for one another, and the charity and care practiced by Naomi’s Hebrew community, comes blessing and new life for Ruth and Naomi.



Last week we recognized God’s Work, Our Hands Sunday by recognizing some of the many ministries we do to extend care beyond our walls.

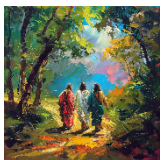
It is a reminder that, as God’s people, we are to care for the wellbeing of all the people in our communities.

God’s work. Our hands. It is a tagline of the Evangelical Lutheran church in America – our national church body – which we have informally adopted as a mission statement for our congregation.

But we add one important piece – God’s work. Our hands. Our voices.
Along with the ministries of giving and sharing and care,
we also lift our voices on behalf of the people in our city, state and nation.
On September 4, Roadrunner Food Bank hosted its first candidate forum,
inviting the gubernatorial candidates to respond to questions about
how they will address food insecurity across New Mexico.
There were 11 of us there from All Saints, and I was proud to be from a faith
community that is so committed to ending hunger in New Mexico
through good public policy.
In our work with Bread for the World and Lutheran Advocacy ministry,
this congregation has consistently engaged our faith in the public arena
on behalf of people experiencing poverty and hunger.

We know that about 1 in 7 Americans, and nearly ¼ of children in NM,
experience food insecurity.
No one should be hungry in one of the richest nations in the world –
that reality is in itself a crisis.
The move to reduce benefits which address food insecurity is a crisis.
As the folks in the Coalition to end hunger say,
Hunger is a policy decision.

Yesterday the policy committee of LAM had visioning and goal-setting retreat.
When asked why we would choose to spend a gorgeous fall Saturday
in a church library focusing on LAM, multiple policy committee members
talked about the work we do as a way to seek hope
in the midst of challenging times.
Working to change policies, to make sure hungry people are fed,
and knowing that we make a difference,
gives us hope on our journey of faith.



Having washed the feet of his disciples, Jesus said to them,
I give you a new commandment –
that you love one another, even as I have loved you.

In the First Nations version Scripture translation, Jesus tells his disciples,

“I am giving you a new road to walk ... This kind of love will be a sign for all people that you are walking the road with me.”

That is the journey of faith we are taking together.

To walk the good road of love and compassion with Jesus

Being in community is not just living side by side.

It is a way of life that chooses care and compassion and hospitality.

It is a choice we make –

a choice of hospitality as the people of Gander made 25 years ago;

a choice of commitment as Ruth and Naomi made to one another;

a choice of compassion as Ruth and Naomi experienced in Bethlehem.

A choice to use our hands, our voices, to do God’s work of love in the world.

May this journey of faith, this journey to community, be one we take together.

Amen.