

Ruth: A Tale of Faithfulness and Courage

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Sunday, November 11, 2018

Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17

Let us pray: O God of Abraham and Sarah, Moses and Zipporah, Ruth and Boaz, Mary and Joseph, speak to us once again from your Holy Scriptures. As we look back through our family history, remind us that you are still with us, helping us navigate through demanding and trying times. Teach us to follow you. Teach us to follow even when we want to lead. Teach us faithfulness and courage. This morning, I pray that you might pour through me the gift of preaching that by some miracle of your grace, you might speak to each one of us in our place of greatest need. And we know that you will, for we pray in Christ's holy name, Amen.

Today I am going to tell you a story right out of our family history book. If you come to church often, you will think this is a well-known story, but I am not going to tell you the part of the story that is well-known. I am going to tell you what happened afterward. In this case, it is what happened afterward that is the reason



why this story was included in the Bible at all. This is the second half of the Ruth story. It's a love story for sure, but, at its core, it is a story of faithfulness and courage. So, sit back and listen to one of the great faith stories from the Bible.



The Book of Ruth tells us that, in the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land of Judah. A certain man from Bethlehem in Judah named Elimelech and his wife Naomi took their two sons Mahlon and Chilion and went to the land of Moab to

find food. Sometime after arriving, Naomi's husband Elimelech died. Naomi was left with her two sons to support her.

The sons took Moabite wives. Chilion married Orpah, and Mahlon married Ruth. Not long after, both sons died as well, leaving three widowed women: Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth. Naomi made a plan. The famine in her home was long over, so Naomi decided to return home to Bethlehem. She loved her daughters-in-law but thought their best chance for survival was for the young women to remarry in Moab and for Naomi to return to Bethlehem. Orpah and Ruth cried for they loved Naomi.



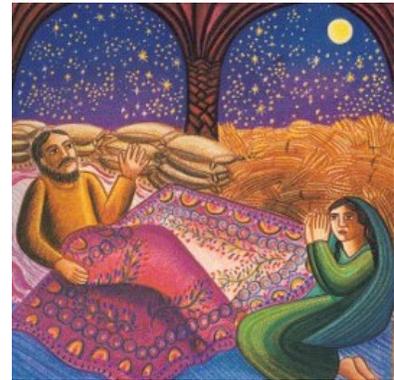
Orpah agreed to return to Moab to try to find another husband, but Ruth wanted to stay in Bethlehem with Naomi. Ruth's devotion to her mother-in-law in 1:16 is so famous they have been engraving it in wedding bands ever since. Ruth declared, "Wherever you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die. There I will be buried." Presbyterian minister and writer Frederick Buechner described this part of Ruth's story in his book *Peculiar Treasures* like this:



Naomi had come home after a 10-year absence, and Ruth had a foreign accent that was charming and distinct. Both women drew attention. Before long, Ruth caught the eye of many men in town, and, in particular, she caught the eye of a prosperous farmer named Boaz. Boaz was an older gentleman, a little long in the tooth, but he was what some would call a silver fox, or a catch. No matter his age, he still recognized a pretty young lady, and, before long, he took Ruth under his wing in a fatherly, protective sort of way. He had heard of their tragic story of loss, so Boaz instructed his workmen to help Ruth in the fields. Naomi and Ruth were living off the gleanings, the leftovers that Hebrew law requires landowners to collect and make

available to the poor. Boaz asked his men to leave extra food for her. He offered her a meal. Boaz said things like, "Come thou hither, young maiden, eat of this bread and dip thy morsel in my wine. She ate and was sufficed." (Ruth 2:14) When Ruth fell on her face at Boaz's feet and said, "How have I found favor in thine eyes?" you just might be able to read between the lines and suspect something going on.

Naomi was no fool. She saw as clear as day what was going on. She saw it way before Ruth did. Naomi was determined to make a good match for Ruth, so she devised a plan. It's a little racy, so I am sorry if it makes you blush. Naomi said to Ruth, one day, when Boaz has had a good meal and a little wine to drink, he will go to the barn, lie down on the hay, and fall asleep. You



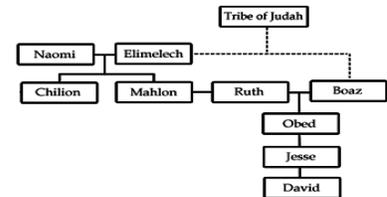
sneak in late at night and cover his feet and keep him warm, so that when he wakes up in the morning, he will want to marry you. Now if you are up on your genealogy of the Bible, you will remember that Boaz's mother was Rahab. Rahab was—how do I say—a professional escort, a hussy, a tramp, a woman of the night. Okay, she was a harlot. Knowing this, and knowing Boaz may have been embarrassed by his mother, Naomi said to Ruth, there is a fine line between being too easy and too hard to get. Tonight, you are going to have to walk the line.

Sure enough, Naomi's plan worked like a charm. Boaz was so taken that this beautiful young lady named Ruth would pay attention to him when so many handsome young men were around that Boaz set out to make Ruth his wife. Soon they were married, and they lived happily ever after.



And here is the part of the story that is important: the genealogy. It seems like a throwaway line, but it is not. Ruth, a far-from-royal,

down-on-her-luck outsider from Moab marries Boaz, a rich old farmer, and, together, without even the help of a fertility clinic, they have a son named Obed. And then Obed had a son of his own whose name was



Jesse. Jesse had two daughters and seven sons. The two daughters were named Zeruah and Abigail, and the seven sons were named Eliab, Abinadab, Shimea, Nethanel, Raddai, Ozem, and David. Did you catch that? The youngest son was David, the greatest king of Israel. With Ruth for a great-grandmother, and Naomi for a great-great-grandmother, you might predict that David was destined for greatness. And that is sort of the point. But the real point of the story is that life knocked them down. And they had to find a way forward. Life handed them a sign that said, “Dead End” and they had to find a new path.

Everyone in this room has faced a dead end at some point in their lives; most of us face many as life “happens to us.” Plan A is suddenly out, and you had better find Plan B fast. Or maybe you are past Plan B and are looking for Plan C or D, or X, Y, or Z. The question is not whether we will get knocked down. The question is how will we find the courage and strength to get up? How will we navigate our way forward each time we get knocked down?

Charles Swindoll is known for many sayings, but perhaps his most famous of all is, “Life is 10% what happens to us, and 90% how we react to it.” In other words, we cannot control what happens to us, but we can control how we react to it. **Attitude is everything.**



Michael Piazza and I meet once a week or once every two weeks, and he fills me in on the interim process, so I am more at ease with what is happening. Recently he said, “When all of the anger and blame dissipates completely,” the energy will shift toward healing the

body of Christ and rebuilding itself. The congregation will become focused on becoming its best self.

“How do you know when the healing and rebuilding are coming?” I said.

He answered, “Once we stop looking at the past and fix our eyes on the future, there will be no stopping us.”

“How exciting!” I remarked. “When will that be?”

“Soon,” he replied. “Very, very soon.”