

“Faith, Family and the Future of Mankind”  
 Sermon for 12 March 2017  
 Text: Ruth 4

When I first got excited about the book of Ruth and heard in the story-line an affirmation of how crucial family is and how indispensable the church *as extended family* is, I wanted to bring that to you in a sermon series. Now we are at the end of that series and it is time to step back and consider some of the truths we have heard. Here’s something that is near the top of the pile, if not the top. The book of Ruth is centrally concerned with faith. We begin the story with a person of demoralized faith, a diminished and devastated faith. I have the unhappy faith of Naomi in view. She has lost so much. Her husband, two sons, both of her children, the hope of grandchildren, her youth (and physical beauty related to youth), her means of support and existential security. This destitution is palpable. It is biographical reality, not merely a sociological situation, or a statistic. Ruth is there to remind us of how personal and real life is. We are not to read about it and not be moved by the suffering and pain depicted. Like I said, we begin with a demoralized faith and that is exactly what comes out of her mouth: **May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me** (v. 8). . . **for the hand of the Lord has gone out against me** (v.13). . . **for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty . . . the Almighty has brought calamity upon me.** (v.20-21) Some of you, or someone you know may be precisely in that place! Unhappy Naomi may be, but not faithless.

But here is a marvelous thing, the two persons closest to her in these days of stripping away, Orpah and Ruth, have diametrically opposed responses/reactions to Naomi’s travail. We hear, God did this and God did that . . . **God dealt with me, God chastened me, God brought me back . . .** and Orpah chooses to remain with her upbringing, her past, her gods and her family *but Ruth acquiring a different kind of faith, a saving and redeeming faith* chooses differently. She chooses to own Naomi’s God, country, people and family. Now the future of mankind hinges on that choice. It does so uniquely in Ruth’s case for she will become the grandmother of King David and a progenitor of the Messiah! *However, Ruth is unaware of the critical importance of her choices: of faith, of family and of mate.* So, family is about children after all! Family is about what comes of marriage and not merely about what it is in the present! The sociological definition of family (a reigning idea in our setting), paired with cultural modifications of what family means do not line up with Scripture. Say, the assertion of family as chiefly a legal and/or civil institution, or as “a mode of companionship” deprive family of God’s regard for progeny, the family name, legacy, inheritance and genealogy. These definitions ignore the outcomes and consequences that God has in mind for family! **In a word, “family” without theology is not biblical!** We cannot ignore God’s plan and God’s purposes for family, in family and get very far at all!

Ruth decides to adopt Naomi’s faith, God and religion and, as a result, *finds herself adopted, or entirely assimilated into the people of God, the Old Testament “church,” as in the congregation of the saints!* Yes, considerations of faith are key to understanding Ruth. Faith rules. Faith is more important than romance, bigger than grief. We know that but if we don’t take care, we end up restricting faith to the personal and subjective realm and we miss the operation of faith in building the extended family

which is the basis of the people of God that God has purposed since the call of Abraham! God has chosen to call a people, to form a nation of those who will live for Him, for His glory and honor, for the praise of His great name. And that may be why Naomi goes to Moab and loses everything! Yes, she goes there to shed her husband and two sons, and through this stripping away, to so witness to Ruth that the one, singular, most important catch of the day, Ruth, is won to God. Oh, God sent Naomi to retrieve Ruth, a woman of faith, to marry with the man of faith, Boaz, whom He had also been preparing for marriage to Ruth *from before the beginning of time*. Now I get it. Isn't it wonderful when people choose to do things God's way?!

Ruth's widowhood and Boaz's bachelorhood are parallel states. They are complementary lives, they are two halves perfectly prepared to make a single whole. And, yes, they are the future family unit into which God would entrust the seed of promise. They were to give birth to true greatness: first, the greatest king Israel has ever known, King David, in a few decades; and, through that same family line, or genealogy, the even greater king, King Jesus—would be born centuries later.

It is better not to be married at all than to be married to the wrong person. Boaz waits. Ruth waits. So, to the matter of faith, and family with children is added the significance of waiting. Waiting on the Lord. Naomi was waiting on the Lord and didn't know it. Even more so Boaz. His friends and family were, most probably, wondering what was up with him! What was his problem? Why wasn't he married and fruitful? Yes, not just married but married with children! He was such a catch: wealthy, worthy and wise. Yes, a godly man of deep and transparent faith! Where was the godly woman who was looking and waiting for him? They were both worth waiting for, would they wait?

I want to underscore this waiting piece. God expects us to embrace waiting. He doesn't want us to go for the gusto and grab all we can as quick as we can. That would be greedy, fleshly—incredibly selfish. What Boaz and Ruth illustrate is that sex can wait. Indeed, they choose to wait for marriage to precede sexual expression, sexual fulfillment. Why? Because waiting for sex until after marriage, as unimaginable as that is to a generation geared up for instant gratification(!), is simply God's way. And, while we are in this neighborhood, we might mention that children are the anticipated outcome of sexual union. We may have our own ideas (sex is about pleasure, sex is for intimacy, there are too many babies, the world cannot sustain any more humans, it's selfish and irresponsible to overpopulate the planet, mankind is a pollutant and a danger to himself—the first two assertions bear some measure of truthfulness, the rest not) *but none of our ideas should be allowed to crowd out, or exclude God's plan and purpose for marriage, sex and progeny*. God has purposed to design our future through the blessing of godly family life and children: biological, adopted or spiritual children, all together. We know this truth through revelation. Revelation is rather like solar energy, it only comes to us from outside, from solar radiation. Over time but in regular doses suggests that our system is actually an open, not a closed system. We are physically and spiritually dependent on power from away for thriving on earth. Let alone surviving in the universe! We have from God and infinite supply of all we need. He commanded us to **be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it**. Yes, the same Lord who fed 5,000 families with five loaves and a few dried fishes, is the one in charge of our provision! He will tell us when we've fulfilled His mandate for us—until then we are to trust in Him.

Ruth was a foreigner, living in Moab, being won to God by an emigre', Naomi, whose husband jumped ship in difficult days for Israel and sought to ride out the famine residing in a foreign land. Think drought—speaking of solar energy. That relocation decision cost him his life, and the loyalty to God, perhaps, of both his sons (who ended up assimilating to the world as Moab, marrying local heathen girls)! Mahlon's faith may have persisted and influenced Ruth's openness to Yahweh-ism. However, we can be sure that few wedding invitations for those marriages went back to family in Israel!! It was not something to boast of.

So Ruth 4 describes Boaz in court, tending to the legalities that encumber his hopes to marry Ruth, and to provide for Naomi as God would have him so. What he does meets with general approval and blessings flow for the new couple. And to bring a conclusion to the whole matter, we are shown the genealogy and its importance is obvious to all!

I wonder if God was concerned that He didn't have Naomi's whole heart until later in her life? Perhaps the spiritual headship was deficient. Would that help explain why she had to lose so much in order to gain back better, more abiding treasure?! Getting her *to come home* took a lot! It took defeat, crushing loss and an unhappy faith to get the job done! There was independent thinking, religious defiance and, shall we say, rebellion to be worked through in Naomi, Ruth and Boaz's lives and the lesson plans included loneliness, fear, anxiety and waiting—oh, and personal catastrophes which Naomi named as **calamities**. Meaning, their lives were remarkably like our own! Imagine that.

So, faith, adoption of God and by God, sex after marriage and patience—waiting for God's best according to God's plan.

**Amen**