

Ruth 1:1-18

There was a television show back in the 1990's that was very popular. The show featured a group of six people in their twenties who spent a lot of time together in a coffee shop in New York City. These six friends were very committed to one another. Over the next ten seasons these friends experienced good relationships, bad relationships, job promotions, and being fired from jobs. They fought with each other, consoled each other, and through all of the good and bad times they were there for one another. They were good friends. Karen and I have been watching reruns of friends on Netflix as we go to sleep at night. In some ways the book of Ruth reads like an episode of friends with the main difference being the way God works to bring people together and to make relationships that last.

The book of Ruth is set during the Old Testament time of the Judges. There was no official monarchy. The Promised land was ruled by the twelve tribes of Israel and protected by God. It was a time when everyone did what was right in their own eyes. There was a famine in the land of Israel and some families left the Promised Land to go to the land of Moab because they heard there was food there. A woman named Naomi was a part of one of those families. Her husband Elimelech took Naomi and their two sons to the land of Moab because of the famine. However, while they were there Elimelech died. Naomi stayed with her two sons. The boys married Moabite wives. One's name was Orpah and the other was named Ruth. Tragedy fell upon the family again as both of Naomi's boys also died. We don't know how, but we do know that now Naomi was a widow with two daughter's – in – law who were also widows. This was a BIG problem.

In the Ancient Near East they didn't have the feminism or women's rights of today. At that time a woman was to do their part, but they had no means of providing income for themselves. Women were taken care of by their Daddies, their husbands and if necessary their sons. When Elimelech moved the family to Moab the family was cut off from their extended family. When Elimelech died there was no one to take care of Naomi except Naomi's sons, and when Naomi's sons died Naomi, Orpah and Ruth were just out of luck.

Word came to Naomi that the famine was over in the Promised Land, and Naomi decided she was going to go back to her family. She had to. There was no one to help look after her in Moab. So Naomi has a bitter heart to heart with her daughters – in – law, Orpah and Ruth. Naomi tells Orpah and Ruth to go back to their mother's homes and to their Moabite gods. At first Orpah and Ruth refuse. They were devoted to their husbands and now they are devoted to their Mother-in-law. This is a wonderful sign of devotion; however, the reality is they are three widows with no means to provide for themselves. Naomi, as the matriarch, has a responsibility to take care of her daughters-in-law, and no means to support them. Naomi is not married and has no more sons for the girls to marry. This is a bad situation. Eventually Orpah relents. She hugs and kisses her mother-in-law, and then returns to her mother's home.

Ruth, however, proves to be the more devoted. Ruth tells Naomi;

¹⁶ But Ruth said, "Entreat me not to leave you or to return from following you; for where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God; ¹⁷ where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if even death parts me from you." ¹⁸ And when Na'omi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.

This morning's passage is beautiful. The passage is beautiful because it speaks to the faithfulness and devotion that is possible among people who love one another. Ruth devotes herself to Naomi. Ruth forsakes her own people. Naomi forsakes the land of her people, and the gods of her people. Instead, Ruth devotes

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herself to Naomi saying, I will go where you go. I will live where you live. I will die where you die. Perhaps most importantly Ruth declares Naomi's God will be Ruth's God.

The protection of family was everything at this tumultuous time in the Ancient Near East. Family protected you. Family provided for you so you would not starve in the summer or freeze in the winter. Ruth was throwing off the ties to her family in order to follow Naomi to the land of the Israelites – a land where Ruth had no connection except through her dead husband.

Sisters and brothers how similar is that to what is happening here this morning? This morning we have baptized these three beautiful children. Their families have pledged their devotion to God by declaring they will raise these children in the way they should walk. And you, like Ruth, have pledged your devotion to God by promising to support these children as the hands and feet of Christ. We have declared we will see to it these children grow closer to God even though we have no blood bond to these children. They are not our relatives, but we will support them because they have been initiated and sealed into the family of God. Through the blood of Christ they are now our brothers and sister.

Our butts are in this too. The family has been inconvenienced in travelling on this cold January morning in questionable conditions. What inconvenience are we willing to suffer to see that these three children are brought up to put God first above love of self, love of entertainment and love of money. Let not evil touch these children's lives and if it does let it not come from our hands, feet or mouths. We should follow Ruth's example and offer Ruth's support as Ruth would come to support her mother-in-law Naomi. Ruth will work the fields to provide for the two of them. Eventually, Ruth would marry according to the custom of the Israelites and continue to provide for her mother-in-law in a land she has no claim to by birth. We can pray our church and this community will receive God's blessings because of this faithfulness in God's Holy Spirit. May our church and our community be blessed because of the love of Christ offered to and through these children.

In the Name of Jesus Christ,

Amen