

Ruth 1:19-22

“Missed Blessings”

Have y’all ever had one of those experiences where you are in a hurry, and you’re looking for something, but it doesn’t matter where you look, that booger is nowhere to be found? **(pause)** Here’s a funny story. When I was in the eighth grade we had a grease fire in our home. My brother and I put out the fire and did the first aid on my Dad, but my Mom, bless her heart, was just a wreck. She was running around the house getting ready to go, but she couldn’t find one of her shoes. Mom was so tore up about what had happened she kept running around the house saying, “I can’t find my shoe! Where’s my shoe?! Help me look for my shoe! I can’t find my shoe!” I think it was my brother Ryan who looked at her and said, “Mom, your shoe is in your hand.” **(pause for chuckles)**. Have y’all ever had something like that happen to you? **(pause)** Have you ever been so caught up in the rush of the moment you could not see what was right in front of you? I think that is what this morning’s passage is all about.

The return to Jerusalem should have been, in a word: pleasant.<sup>1</sup> It was a homecoming – a homecoming from a bad situation. Coming back to Jerusalem for Naomi should have been like a moment of salvation for the widow with no one to support her. In Bethlehem she was surrounded by family who could help her make a fresh start. Naomi could only see what she had lost. As a result she had become bitter.<sup>2</sup> Naomi was bitter about life. She was bitter about her situation. How many of y’all know of parents who have grown children move back in with them because they have suffered a failure, or because their plans did not turn out the way they expected? This is Naomi’s struggle. She is so caught up in her grief she cannot see that God has ended the famine in Israel. God has provided for Naomi’s return to Bethlehem from the land of Moab. God has given Naomi the gift of a devoted daughter – in – law. Perhaps Naomi did not have as much reason to be bitter as Naomi thought. How many times do we make that mistake? How many times are we so focused on the challenge in front of us; our preoccupation; the trouble in our lives that we cannot see the very thing we are looking for, like my mother’s shoe, is right in our hand the whole time? **(pause)** How many times have we lost sight of what God has put right in front of us?

Let’s have a show of hands. How many of y’all have heard this phrase before? God never gives you more than you can handle. **(pause for hands)** Yes, or No Church, do y’all believe this saying is true? **(pause)** This saying is absolutely NOT true. You’ve heard of fake news. This is a fake truth saying. God will absolutely give you more than you can handle. Adam and Eve were absolutely not equipped for life outside the Garden of Eden so God made them clothes. Cain was not prepared for a life of banishment, yet even in punishment God provided for Cain. The flood was too much for Noah, and God showed Noah how to build a boat. Abraham did not know where he was supposed to go, and God tells Abraham, “Go to the land I will show you,” and, “I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you and through you all the families of the earth will bless themselves” (Gen 12:1 & 3). It seems to me God routinely gives us more than we can handle. God gave these more than they could handle so that God’s goodness, glory and strength might be better demonstrated and understood.

Naomi had been given more than she could handle. Her husband was dead, her two sons were dead. There was no one to provide for Naomi or her two daughters – in – law. It was more than Naomi could handle. Naomi was so woe is me she couldn’t see what God had given her. Let me ask y’all something. Can y’all guess what my mother would say to me if I got all, “Woe is me.” My mother would tease me. She would look at me and in that playground teasing voice say, “Nobody likes me. Everybody hates me. I’m gonna eat some worms!”

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<sup>1</sup> Naomi means pleasant.

<sup>2</sup> Mara means bitter.

(pause for a laugh) Did any of y'all have Mommas like that? (pause) Were any of y'all Momma's like that? (pause). In this passage Naomi might as well be saying, "Nobody likes me. God hates me. I'm gonna eat some worms." Church, do y'all know people like that? (pause) If we are really honest do we act like that when we don't get our way? Maybe, just maybe, some of us are a little more like Naomi than we would like to admit. The question for us this morning is how do we see the good right in front of us when we are troubled, or stressed, or feeling attacked or scared? How do we see, feel and connect to the blessings God puts right in front of us when we are too woe is me to see them?

I need to give a full confession this morning. I am a doer. When life goes sideways I try to do more. I don't like to feel out of control. When I feel out of control or like circumstances are out of control I try to do more. I try to take control because I think that I will ease my anxiety and apprehension. By doing more and covering ALL of the bases, or playing ALL of the positions I am trying to make myself feel better. (pause) Do you wanna know a secret? (pause) Doing more, and pushing harder only very very rarely eases my anxiety. Most of the time doing more and pushing harder only drives my anxiety level up in a different direction. The pushing makes me *CRAZY*. (pause) Driving myself crazy does not feel very good. So if pushing harder; doing more; pulling ourselves up by our boot straps is not the answer, what is? What are we supposed to do when life feels crazy and out of control?

For me the first thing to do is to recognize when I am in full on control freak mode. I have to recognize I am being nutty and trying **TO TAKE OVER THE WORLD**. Some days it's really hard to recognize when I've gone a little nutty. My wife helps me out with this a lot. I trust people in the church to help me out. If y'all can't identify when you are ramping up it's a good idea to find someone you can trust who will tell you, "Hey, slow down. I can hear the squirrels in the trees. They can smell it on you when you go nuts." In Naomi's bitterness, her, "woe is me-ness," Naomi could do nothing to save either of them. Naomi could not do this for herself so God chose to use Ruth to save them both. Naomi needed help, and sometimes so do we.

In my experience looking out for each other as a trusted friend is a big part of the work of being the Church. We are supposed to look out for each other. We are NOT supposed to judge, but there is a lot to be said for being in each other's lives. There is a lot to be said for walking down the roads that bring us closer to God together. So many of us hardly know the other people sitting in our pews. What would it look like to trust each other enough to be able to say, "I can hear the squirrels in the trees. They're after us!" What would it look like to have the trust of the community? What would it look like to be trusted enough in the community that when we see snobbery toward new people, indifference to the poor and the needy, and to underprivileged children that when Central speaks up the community trusts us not to judge, or condemn because the people outside our church in this community knows us?

My sisters and brothers do we see the blessings God has placed right in front of us in family, friends and a church that loves us? Are we so caught up in our woes we cannot see where God is moving right in front of us? Do we have a group of friends who will tell us when we've become a little nutty and need help throttling back the speed of our lives? There are so many things in our lives that get in the way. Let us devote ourselves to prayer this week. Let us devote ourselves to taking the time to ask God to show us the way. Maybe, just maybe if Naomi had been able to give herself a break from her bitterness she would have been able to see God at work right in front of her. Maybe prayer will give us the same chance and help us to put the craziness of our lives into perspective by putting God first.

In the name of Jesus Christ – Amen.