

COURAGEOUS WOMEN
Ruth 3: 1-5; 4:13-17
Lexington Presbyterian Church
November 11, 2018

A story as old as time...

Ruth and Naomi - two women caught in a time and place that is not hospitable to women.

Ruth and Naomi - two women unrelated except by marriage (not to each other) from two different cultures - possible enemies if given the right circumstances.

Ruth and Naomi - two women determined to survive not in spite of each other but because of each other; because of their love for each other.

Life can hand us unexpected, unusual, difficult circumstances which can complicate our lives. Life can also hand us expected, mundane, easy circumstances that also can complicate our lives.

And so, Ruth and Naomi find themselves widowed without ways or means to support themselves in a culture that considers widowed women a burden and a liability. Naomi's plan is to return to her hometown of Bethlehem, which ironically someday will be called the City of David, to find a source of help for their destitute situation.

Fortunately in this Hebrew town there is a theological understanding that the poor, and orphaned, and widows deserve and need help. Ruth is able to glean in the barley field to provide daily bread to eat to sustain herself and Naomi. It is the kindness of Boaz the owner of the fields who orders his workers to leave extra grain in the field for Ruth to pick up as she gleans.

However Naomi realizes a need for something beyond this temporary fix for their dilemma. And this is where both Naomi and Ruth must find within themselves courage with which to address an untenable day to day existence. Naomi knows two things which will help: 1) that Ruth has caught the attention of Boaz and 2) that Boaz is a not-so distant relative that could be part of an honorable solution. And perhaps

even more important than either of those two details, Naomi knows that Ruth is a loyal, loving, caring daughter-in-law who would do anything for Naomi.

Without going into too much detail, Naomi devises a creative plan which will send Boaz a unmistakable message to know that Ruth is willing to be his wife. Boaz responds with chivalry, tenderness and discretion. He immediately takes action to follow rules of redemption as prescribed by Jewish law, proving to be the righteous man that Ruth and Naomi believe him to be. The result is marriage and a child named Obed who will become the great grandfather of King David.

This a story of God working through human capability to respond to the need of the stranger with hospitality, generosity, and loving kindness. Righteousness and justice are worked out in ways that don't necessarily follow the expected order. It is also a story of women with strength and courage acting on their faith in a provident God.

Today we see evidence of a providential God working through women as they step forward with strength and courage to speak out against injustice and abuse of power. Women who are accepted for their wisdom, vision and commitment to justice.

Ruth holds an important place in the line of salvation history. Untold numbers of women long forgotten also have been part of the workings of God. Though the story of these women's courage is lost to generations past and to us, we know that God is an equal opportunity user of every person to work out the grace that is God.

Women have been stepping out of their comfort zone for centuries building one courageous act upon another, one voice speaking out so that the next day two voices can be heard. Women who see God's hand in ways that lead to a path to work for justice, equity and peace. Ruth and Naomi, two women open to God's will.

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