

SERMON OT RUTH 2019
OCTOBER 12/13, 2019

1ST LUTHERAN, MARSHALL
PASTOR SCOTT FULLER

RUTH 1:1-17; MARK 12:38-44

Against All Odds

Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we believe and in believing we obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.

The experience of Ruth is a story about a young woman's incredibly brave, unbelievably generous, and absolutely life-giving ***leap of faith!***



In passionately poetic fashion, Ruth demonstrates an amazing and determined sense of commitment. She, who has absolutely nothing in this world to offer, nevertheless promises:

- to care for Naomi, her mother-in-law, for the rest of her life,
- to help the two of them survive against all odds, and
- to place her trust in Naomi's God despite all the evidence that it would most likely not do them much good.

The two women have very little in common except:

- their gender,
- their relationship as daughter-in-law & mother-in-law, and
- their status as widows...at a time when widows were only a burden...

Their's was an unhappy, unsafe, unhopeful sorority!

Naomi knows this, knows the way the world works, AND knows that, most likely, life will not work out well for EITHER OF THEM.

So she tries her hardest to convince her daughter-in-law to:

- stay in her **home** country,
- return to her **mother's** house,
- look for kindness among **her** kin – because life for two resourceless widows was often brutal...and full of peril. The same would **also** be true if, by some miracle, they could find their way back to **Israel** – it was just the way of that dog-eat-dog world.

But...Ruth has made up her mind:

- when she married Naomi's son, she made a new life, sad as it is now...
- as Naomi's daughter-in-law she's committed to her new mother, sad as Naomi is now...and
- as Ruth has embraced Naomi's God, so she promises to worship and serve the Lord...in spite of all that has gone so terribly wrong.

I invite you to think/write/or talk with your neighbor about a time when you felt at the end of your rope, empty of hope, certain that problems or pain or peril would be your life-long companions...

Take 30 seconds each...

I'm guessing some of you remember that amazing 1995 historical docu-drama movie, Apollo 13. It tells the story of NASA's ill-fated mission to return to the moon. After successfully lifting-off and having set a trajectory that would carry them to their goal, the spacecraft suddenly suffers a terrible explosion. None of the three astronauts are hurt, but the ship is, and it quickly becomes clear that NASA is facing a terrible dilemma.

Hurling toward the moon, the craft has no power to stop and turn around – the explosion destroyed any hope for returning to earth in control. Turns out the astronauts' **only** hope, then, is to keep heading for the moon. However, instead of landing on it, they'll swing around it in orbit and use the moon's gravity like they're the rock in an old fashioned sling shot (think David and Goliath!!) to send themselves back to earth...

At a terribly tense time in the movie, Ed Harris, playing the part of Gene Kranz, the crusty Flight Director at Mission Control, addresses his group of embattled, confused, sleep-deprived engineers. He gives them his version of

a pep-talk. Weary from a lack of sleep, a lack of information, a lack of options, a lack of everything, nevertheless, the director tells the team that they will succeed in their mission to bring those astronauts safely home. The line in the movie script has been dramatized, but the actual people agreed that it captures the sentiment of what was happening. Says Kranz's character:



In a very real sense, Mr. Kranz could very well have been channeling his *inner Ruth*...because that's exactly (in so many words!) what she says to her mother-in-law about their chance of survival: *failure is not an option*...

Q: Have you ever felt convicted by the Spirit to stand firm, to dig deep or forge ahead against all odds because you KNEW it was the right thing to do?

You'll want to read – or re-read the whole story of Ruth – it's only 4 chapters long!!! So, spoiler alert – plug your ears **now** if you do NOT want to hear how Ruth's amazing saga comes to end...ready???

She and her mother-in-law make their way to Israel... And on the trip, Naomi manages to shed part of the dark shroud of death that had forced itself upon her. Inspired, I believe, by Ruth's dogged determination to make things work out right, Naomi remembers that she has a shirt-tail relative who might, just might, take pity on their woeful plight – and at least allow the women to survive on his generosity.

Well, against all odds, their Hail-Mary plan pays off! Ruth goes to the fields of Boaz, who has actually heard of this young foreign woman's devotion to

his relative Naomi. In fact, he welcomes her – and even instructs his laborers to make certain that 1) Ruth has plenty of grain to keep the two women secure; and 2) that none of the workers molest her. Could their struggle simply to survive possibly come to a peaceful end?

I invite you to think/write/or talk with your neighbor about how you were once led out of a painful darkness. Who helped you see the light? Who blessed you with a gift of companionship? Who was able to give you a sense of hope?

Yet, our drama has not yet been brought to its conclusion. For **here** this story about *love and surviving* turns into a story about *love and thriving*. Naomi, now filled with food and hopeful that there might be the dawn of a new day ahead, counsels her daughter-in-law on how to present herself to Boaz as a possible wife. Ruth again honors her mother-in-law, does what she's instructed to do, and the rest, as they say, is history.



The women's benefactor proves to be a man of both heart and honor. He takes Ruth as his wife, and Naomi into their family – and the two women are finally home...in Bethlehem, which means, House of Bread – never to be hungry or frightened again.

During the long hours of waiting for the Apollo 13 astronauts to come home to earth in their crippled ship, the news stations played interviews that had been prepared beforehand. One reporter asked the commander, Jim Lovell (played by Tom Hanks), if he'd ever been scared while flying.

The pilot described a flight out over the Sea of Japan – it was a dark night and his radar had jammed – turns out it was leading him away from the ship that he was trying to land on. So he flipped on his map light, and – zap! – suddenly everything shorted out – his instruments, his lights – everything – he found himself truly flying blind.

On top of all that, he was running out of fuel, so the only thing left for him to do was to ditch the aircraft in the ocean and hope that he could survive long enough for someone to find him.

But...when Lovell looked back out over the water...he saw below him a green trail. Turns out it was a line of the phosphorescent algae that gets churned up by the engines of a huge ship. Said, Lovell – *It was a green carpet leading me home!* And the only reason he could see that trail guiding him to safety was because his lights had shorted-out. He finished the interview by saying, *You never know what events are going to transpire to get you home...*

I invite you to think/write/or talk with your neighbor about a time when God *manifested some event to get you home...*

You never know what events are going to transpire to get you home...

The same is true with Ruth. When all seemed lost, she saw the path that led her and Naomi to safety, to home...and that could be a happy ending, couldn't it? But...the story's not over yet.



The gospel writer Matthew presents – as his opening – a genealogy, a word picture of ancestors that stretches all the way back to Abraham and Sarah. Those 16 verses include 41 names of men, and only 4 women. One of those women is – you guessed it, **Ruth**! This foreigner, whom you know by now, manifests some amazing attributes:

Ruth is loyal:

-She attaches herself to Naomi and refuses to take no for an answer.

Ruth is merciful:

-She devotes her life to caring for her mother-in-law.

Ruth is willing to sacrifice:

-She puts her life on the line to bring life and hope to their family.

Ruth becomes the great-grandmother of...King David...and, as such, the ancestor of Jesus – son of Mary and Joseph, born in...Bethlehem, the House of Bread, to become the Bread of Life for all people.

Imagine the family sitting around the campfire and telling their young son, Jesus, about his loyal, and merciful, and determined ancestor Ruth – a foreign woman who came to understand the amazing truth of grace: that all are welcome in the Lord's family.

Jesus grows up to be loyal, merciful, and willing to sacrifice – I guess those attributes must run in the family...our family – our family of faith.

Thanks be to God. Amen.