

Who doesn't love the story of Ruth? First of all, it is only four chapters long. And it is one of the only two books written about a woman and let me tell you that girl was brave! Imagine yourself in her situation at least imagine yourself as a mouse in the corner watching this. You're a Moabite, your ancestor's religion sacrifices children. Creepy... You end up marrying a guy from a different religion and you get to hang out with this family who is not like those you grew up with. Your father in law's name basically meant that he worships God and your mother in law, is as sweet as her name, Naomi which means pleasantness. Your husband and his brother are both sickly though, which ironically is what they were named at birth. All the men of the household die. Now you are left with a depressed mother in law, who is very bitter and your widow sister in law. In those days, you would have had no option for a job or way to make a living on your own. Your mother in law tells you she is going to move 30-mile away to Bethlehem, because she heard there is food there and she tells you, you are not to come with her! You protest because you don't want her to go alone, you love her, and you probably don't want to go back to your family. She gets stern and tells you she can't give you another husband, so why would you want to come! (In those days if your husband died you were to marry his brother, but there was no brother to be had).

Your sister in law takes off. What do you do?

Well Ruth, whose name means friend, lives up to the hype. She shows courage, strength, and compassion.

She makes an eloquent oath, saying “Where ever you go, I will go and where you die, I will die.” She also makes a **great statement** of faith saying that your God will be my God and may God deal with me as he sees fit for this decision. So off they go into the unknown. Ruth is the epitome of an obedient servant of God in the midst of a very scary and traumatic situation. This young widow, who was raised as an outsider, grabs hold of her mother in law and her faith and says “let’s do this together”.

Ruth becomes selfless. She cares more about her mother in law than what will happen to her or what others will think of her. This was rare then and is still now. Hundreds of articles and psychologists are telling us in order to be happy we have to be selfish. But I believe the key to living a joy-filled life requires the practice of gratitude, at least that is what Brene Brown's research proves. Ruth is definitely “daring greatly” in this story. Showing empathy and exposing vulnerability does not seem like a brave act of strength, but in fact, it is the most valorous thing you can do. You cannot have courage without vulnerability. Ask anyone who has fought in a war, raised a bipolar child, or invented some new medical treatment. You have to be willing to fail to succeed and that my friends takes vulnerability.

The gospel lesson for this week, from Mark 3:33-35 quotes Jesus asking who his mother and brothers are. It seems like an odd question, but then Jesus gives the answer, his brother and sister and mother are those that do the will of God. You have heard the old saying you can pick your friends, but you can’t pick your family right? Sometimes our family members do not act in ways that are respectful or caring. We often hurt the ones we love and in contrast, we choose not to love especially when things get hard. Do not get me wrong, I know from personal experience and from working with abused children for 20 years there are many unsafe and unhealthy relationships out there.

People are suffering in abusive and malnourished life situations and they should never endure or tolerate this, but we have to decipher the difference between these situations and the ones where people walk away just because things get tense or uncomfortable. It takes a great deal of love to stand up for a troubled child in a school system that only wants them to conform, but it is necessary and can make a difference. It takes courage to write a letter to the editor pointing out inequality towards of immigrant family who is trying to fit in but does not understand all the laws and expectations yet. It takes fortitude to be compassionate to an alcoholic who needs someone to believe in him even if that does not change the choices that are made. Proverbs 3:5-6/says “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding”. If we try to set the agenda and control everything, we are bound to fail. But failing should not be our fear, the question we should be asking ourselves is **who is it we put our faith in?** Ruth put her faith in the Lord. He will give us the strength to achieve more than we could ever do on our own.

Naomi is not the villain in this story. She represents all of us, who are both bitter and sweet at times.

The story of Ruth ends with her marriage to a kind and good man. She and her mother in law are well cared for, because of Ruth's willingness to be unselfish, vulnerable, and obedient to the Lord. The Lord deals with her well granting her security, love, and children. Choices matter, especially in traumatic and challenging times. “The world and its desires pass away, but whoever does the will of God will live forever.”(1 John 2:17) “In all things God works for the good of those that love him.” (Roman 8:28) Ruth ends up being the great grandmother of King David, who from which came Mary and our Savior Jesus.

You go, girl! Thanks be to God.