

INI

St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
October 27, 2019
20th Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: 2 Timothy 1:3-14, Luke 17:1-10
Hymns: 21:1-3; 37; 447; 453:2 (242:1-3)

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Ruth 1:1-19a

Now it came to pass, in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem, Judah, went to dwell in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. ²The name of the man *was* Elimelech, the name of his wife *was* Naomi, and the names of his two sons *were* Mahlon and

Chilion—Ephrathites of Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to the country of Moab and remained there. ³Then Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died; and she was left, and her two sons. ⁴Now they took wives of the women of Moab: the name of the one *was* Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth. And they dwelt there about ten years.

⁵Then both Mahlon and Chilion also died; so the woman survived her two sons and her husband.

⁶Then she arose with her daughters-in-law that she might return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the Lord had visited His people by giving them bread. ⁷Therefore she went out from the place where she was, and her two daughters-in-law with her; and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. ⁸And Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each to her mother's house. The Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me.

⁹The Lord grant that you may find rest, each in the house of her husband.”

So she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. ¹⁰ And they said to her, “Surely we will return with you to your people.”

¹¹ But Naomi said, “Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? *Are* there still sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? ¹² Turn back, my daughters, go—for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, *if* I should have a husband tonight and should also bear sons, ¹³ would you wait for them till they were grown? Would you restrain yourselves from having husbands? No, my daughters; for it grieves me very much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me!”

¹⁴ Then they lifted up their voices and wept again; and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

¹⁵ And she said, “Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.”

¹⁶ But Ruth said:

“Entreat me not to leave you,
Or to turn back from following after you;
For wherever you go, I will go;
And wherever 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.
The LORD do so to me, and more also,
If *anything but* death parts you and me.”

¹⁸ When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she stopped speaking to her.

¹⁹ Now the two of them went until they came to Bethlehem. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

In Christ Jesus, God our Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Faithfulness --

Faithfulness is a quality that is important in many areas of life. One is expected to be faithful to duty with one's job or office. Depending on the level of responsibility one has determines how much that impacts other people. Spouses vow to be faithful in their marriages. It is evident in our society that this is a weakness in the fabric of our society. Parents need to be faithful in attending to the needs of their children. As parents age, children are often looked upon to care for their parents. Again this is an area in which faithfulness to duty is important, but perhaps it is an area where we see some fail to grasp this as their duty or seem incapable of such faithfulness.

As we look at our text we read of an intimate bond between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. A portion of this text is often used for weddings to deliver a message about faithfulness between spouses. Such is the example of the faithfulness of Ruth to her mother-in-law Naomi. However, underlying this evident faithfulness of daughter-in-law to her mother-in-law is a greater and more significant faithfulness, and one that is exceedingly rare in this world. This faithfulness is not a product of human will, but a fruit of the Holy Spirit.

It is our tradition as Christians to confess our faith in Jesus and pledge our faithfulness to His truth, which is found in all of Holy Scripture. We are to continue faithfully in the teaching of the prophets and the apostles. These sacred writings are the Word of God and possess the authority of God to determine matters of faith and life. We pledge our faithfulness at our baptisms, and renew that vow of faithfulness at our confirmations, and affirm it regularly in our worship. However when we walk out the church door what we might call "real life" begins. For far too many of us, and far too often for all of us there may be a break between what we say in our baptismal vows and

the manner of life we live in this world. It is so easy to be drawn into the ways of the world.

In Ruth's life we are shown --

THEME: Faithfulness in Real Life.

Faithfulness to God is often revealed in one's choices in life.

I. Practical Choices May Conform to the Way of the World.

It all comes down to what is in one's heart. That is not always possible for us to discern. Let us consider again the circumstances of Ruth's life, and how she found herself connected to Naomi.

It was in the time of the judges. This period of history in Israel is described as a time when "everyone did what was right in his own eyes." (Judges 17:6) instead of "what was right in the eyes of the Lord." (1 Kings 15:5) That means what it says. While some followed the ways of the Lord, and were faithful, many did exactly what they felt like doing; what they saw seemed to work for their unbelieving neighbors. There were frequent cycles of the Children of Israel forsaking the Lord, and the Lord sending judgment upon them and then a time of repentance and deliverance. At the opening of our text Israel was enduring such a time of judgment with a severe and prolonged famine impacting the country. There was a man of Judah from the area of Bethlehem named Elimelech, which means "God is my king." He had heard that there was food in the neighboring country of Moab, and so he packed up his wife and two sons and went where he could better provide for their needs.

This in itself was not wrong. The Lord reveals the man's name for a reason. This man lived according to the meaning of his name. The Lord ruled his life. It is fully

appropriate to conclude this from the full account of Ruth's life.

However while living in Moab Elimelech died. Naomi's two sons found wives from among the Moabites. These two young men also got sick and died. It is interesting to note that their names Mahlon and Kilion both indicate their weakness in health, that they were sickly perhaps from childhood. That left the widows to fend for themselves. Hearing that the drought had ended in Israel Naomi determined to return home to Bethlehem. However she understood that it would be difficult for her daughters-in-law to live in Judah. They would be unlikely to find prospects for husbands among the Israelites.

Well intentioned and seemingly wise advice is not always the best advice. Encouraging her daughters-in-law not to follow her back to Bethlehem was certainly well intentioned, and heartfelt. Naomi didn't want them to suffer discrimination at the hands of the Israelites. They had little chance of finding a new husband there. Naomi wouldn't have sons to be their husbands. So with love in her heart Naomi directed her two dear daughters-in-law to return to their parents' homes, but that meant also returning to their parents' gods, the false gods of the people of Moab. Orpah, with many tears, followed Naomi's advice and returned to Moab.

This is the point that we need to consider carefully for ourselves. We are often in a position to give advice to the people we love. We are often making decisions that will have a spiritual impact on our lives that we may fail to consider. We may find ourselves along with our loved ones at a spiritual crossroads in life. We need to recognize when we are standing at a spiritual crossroads. The choice we make at that point in time can be a huge determining factor in how our lives, or the lives of our children will turn out. This should not only be in regard to material or temporal things, but also in regard to spiritual things. What is seen as the practical choice may not always be the

spiritually wise choice. And we need to say “may” because we can conclude that Elimelech took the Lord with him and his family to Moab. However Naomi’s practical and loving advice to her daughters-in-law assumed that they would return to the false gods of Moab. While that may have made this life much easier for them, it could well be the end of their relationship with the LORD, the only true God, the covenant God who alone brings salvation to mankind.

What is apparent in Ruth’s life story is that --

II. Faithfulness to God Goes Against Human Nature.

Jeremiah presented a message from the LORD concerning such crossroads in life. It is sited on our bulletin cover this morning. *“Thus says the Lord: ‘Stand in the ways (or the crossroads) and see, And ask for the old paths, where the good way is, And walk in it; Then you will find rest for your souls.’ But they (that is the people of Judah) said, ‘We will not walk in it.’ ”* (Jeremiah 6:16) The natural man, like the Jews of Jeremiah’s day, will say “**NO!**” to the way of the Lord. Often faithfulness to God appears to be totally impractical, even to some ridiculous! Some might even challenge a decision a Christian makes asking if they are nuts, or asking if they realize the impact it will have on their jobs or their lives. Naomi was very careful to lay out what the probable earthly consequences would be for Ruth if she accompanied Naomi back to Bethlehem of Judah.

We are familiar with Ruth’s response: *“Entreat me not to leave you, Or to turn back from following after you; For wherever you go, I will go; And wherever 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. The LORD do so to me, and more also, If anything but death parts you and me.”*

Where did such a response come from? From Ruth's devotion to Naomi or from Ruth's faith in the Lord, the God of Israel? Her appeal to the LORD's judgment reveals the faith in Ruth's heart. By marrying into Naomi's family Ruth had been brought to the knowledge of the one true God, who is not only the Creator of all, but the Savior of all! Faithfulness to God is faith's response to God's faithfulness to the underserving sinner. Ruth recognized the grace of God and put her trust in the LORD, built her hope for a future in the God she knew and trusted. She declared an absolute commitment **to the LORD**. Ruth would be faithful in her life. Naomi finally recognized this and *"When she saw that she was determined to go with her, she stopped speaking to her."¹⁹ Now the two of them went until they came to Bethlehem."* (Ruth 1:18-19a)

In the epistle to the Hebrews we read: *"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen!"* (Hebrews 11:1) The writer to the Hebrews then proceeds to list many Old Testament heroes of faith who, looking beyond this life, built their lives on the hope of salvation promised by God for all who believe. That is exactly what Ruth did and what she expressed in her determination to be faithful both to Naomi and to the LORD **her** God! Her faithfulness was graciously rewarded by the LORD. He granted her a husband named Boaz, and they had a child, and Ruth was the great-grandmother of King David, and was ultimately found faithful by the LORD so that she also is listed among the ancestors of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

By the Spirit's guidance Ruth made the right choice, ignoring the practical worldly advice of Naomi and insisting on faithfulness to both the LORD and her mother-in-law for her direction in life.

Was that a rare exception? Or is God faithful to bless those who put their trust in Him? Well, the Spirit assures us of the faithfulness of our God in many ways, beginning with the fulfillment of all gospel promises in the life,

death, and resurrection of our Savior Jesus Christ. We have life and immortality revealed for us in the gospel! Sometimes we forget that God's grace and providence extends to every blessing in this life also. He promises to care for us in all our ways, and invites us to put our trust in Him by continuing to be faithful in all our ways. He assures us: *"Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; ⁶In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths."*

(Proverbs 3:5-6) The LORD will be with us in this life and will be gracious. Faithfulness to God is the way of life everlasting, because of the LORD! He is our God and our Redeemer forevermore.

May Ruth's faithfulness serve as our example of living a faith-filled life to the glory of God and blessing of all around us!

AMEN.

"Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Amen. (Romans 15:13)