

Rev. Dan Welch Pent. 18 10-12-25 Text- Ruth 1:1-19a

Today's text comes from one of my favorite books of the Old Testament: Ruth! It's a short book, only four chapters long. Yet the book of Ruth delivers to us an enduring and inspiring story of faithfulness, loyalty, and love. It demonstrates how God can turn tragedy into triumph. And as we'll see today, the book of Ruth reveals how God is at work in the seemingly routine patterns of life to lead us out of ***disillusionment with life*** to ***rejoicing in life*** under His fatherly care.

Let's jump right in! Immediately in the opening verses of chapter one, we witness the incredible devotion that this young woman, Ruth has for her mother-in-law, Naomi. It's a devotion that's captured in Ruth's inspiring promise of faithfulness: "Where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried" (vv. 16-17).

As beautiful as these words are, and with so much that could be learned from looking at the life of Ruth, this morning I'd like to do something different. I would like instead to talk about ... Naomi.

Like Ruth, Naomi also has some memorable and significant words in chapter 1. However, Naomi's comments reflect a much different emotional mindset than that of young Ruth's. In Naomi's own words to her daughters-in-law Ruth and Orpah, the more seasoned ***and*** cynical Naomi laments, "No, my daughters, it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me" (v. 13).

This is Naomi's heartfelt confession of her experience with the God of Israel. Life has been exceedingly bitter for her. And so, she is convinced that God's hand has gone out against her.

Where did Naomi's disillusionment come from? It all started years earlier when a severe famine struck the land of Israel. That brutal shortage of food forced Naomi, her husband, and their two sons to move away from the Promised land to the land of the Moabites. These were ancient enemies of Israel, who worshipped false gods.

Next in the series of stinging events for Naomi, it was the heartbreaking death of her husband Elimelech. And as if that were not enough, next came the tragic deaths of both of her sons, Mahlon and Chilion, the husbands of Ruth and Orpah, whom they had met and married in Moab. Naomi is now convinced that she has lost any hope of a good and sustainable future. After all, she reasoned, she was too old to bear any more sons, and what's more she could not expect to easily find any husbands for her two widowed daughters-in-law in Israel, the

place to where she was now returning. In despair, Naomi cries out that life has become exceedingly bitter for her. In fact, when she **does** return to Israel, Naomi tells the women there that no longer should they call her Naomi. "Call me Mara", she says (which means bitter), "for life has become very bitter for me".

(Pause) Now, stepping away from the story for a moment, we don't have patron saints in the Lutheran church but if we did, I think we could rightly call Naomi, "The Patron Saint of Disillusionment." Naomi started out thinking that her life was going to go **one** way, and instead it went completely **South!** Naomi is disillusioned, disenchanted, and dissatisfied with her life. In no way whatsoever did things turn out the way she expected.

Have you ever gone through times in your life when you felt similar to how Naomi felt? At least a **little** bit? I know there have been times when I've found Naomi to be very relatable. I'm probably not the only one.

It happens. Sometimes life simply didn't turn out the way you expected it to. Maybe you or someone you love has a marriage that doesn't turn out how it was expected to go. Or maybe one's children don't turn out the way one hoped and anticipated them to turn out. Or much worse, maybe it's the loss of a child. On a different level, perhaps it is your job that didn't turn out the way you expected it to, and you had to choose another career path. Maybe what brings you disillusionment like Naomi's is how someone else has treated you or talked about you behind your back. Or perhaps it's guilt of a past sin that continues to make your life feel bitter.

(Pause) There is false idea out there that many Christians hold on to: It's the idea that if you are **good**, if you go to church, everything will work out well for you in life; that everything will turn out perfectly fine for you in this world. But the one true Gospel of Jesus Christ is not an earthly, prosperity gospel.

Nevertheless, a lot of people have bought into this idea. "If I do the right thing, if I play by the rules God will reward me with a good life, the **best** life, here and now. But then after a while, when such a person stops and look at the reality of their life, it **feels** like God has turned against them. And it can be extremely upsetting. **That's** how Naomi felt.

Yes, in the **words** of Naomi from Ruth chapter 1, we witness someone who is **extremely** disillusioned. **But** as the story unfolds in this wonderful little book, we see how God truly **is** at work in the **life** of Naomi. We watch as the Lord works for this one who is so disheartened, who thought God would work and act one way for her, but didn't. And yet, the amazing truth is that God is still

there for Naomi. He's been there all along, working good for her and turning things around.

To Naomi, God reveals love in the midst of disaster. Naomi is bitter. She even renames herself "bitter". She believes God has put out His hand against her; so, she's going back to Israel where her distant relatives live. But after she arrives back in her homeland, she soon discovers and **experiences** firsthand that God has put into place certain patterns of life that cause Naomi to be cared for.

First of all, in chapter two we discover the pattern in place of the gleaning of crops so that the poor can survive. You see, "(t)he Law of Moses found in the book of Leviticus (chapters 19 & 23) instructed landowners to leave what the harvesters missed. This way the poor, the strangers, the widowed, and the fatherless could glean the remaining grain in order to have food for their families." (Faith Alive Student Bible, CPH, 2011, p.311). Ruth knew about this and after seeking Naomi's blessing, she went and gleaned in the fields of a wealthy relative of Naomi, named Boaz.

Much more than providing for Naomi and Ruth's day-to-day sustenance, however, God had also introduced in the book of Leviticus the law of kinsman-redeemer (ch. 25). The kinsman-redeemer, "was a person who had a duty to help another relative.' One of the things the kinsman-redeemer could do involved marrying the widow of a brother (or another close relative), so that she would be provided for and so that the family line of the deceased man could continue on." Ibid, p.312).

Naomi remembered this and so she soon convinced Ruth to let Boaz know that, if he wished, he could redeem her, since she was a widow of one of his relatives. Well, to make a short story even shorter, this is what Boaz ended up doing. In the end, he married Ruth. He took care of both Ruth **and** Naomi. Soon after, Ruth and Boaz had a son who would carry on the lineage of Naomi. So, at the end of the book, Naomi, who had been convinced that God's hand had gone out against her, was holding on her lap, a grandson.

So, we see in the story of Ruth, how the Lord orders things in this world in such a way that Naomi who was upset with God, who wants nothing to do with God, and calls herself bitter, finds that God is still taking care of her. He does it through the way that He has established patterns of life, patterns like gleaning and the kinsman-redeemer.

And this is a message of great hope for **us**! As Christians God has established patterns; patterns in our lives, patterns like prayer before meals that remind us that God will always provide us with our daily bread, like he provided for Ruth and Naomi. God has established patterns of morning and evening prayers, that

ask God for His forgiveness for sins, protection from evil, and that our doings and life would be pleasing to our Father in Heaven. God also establishes patterns in our vocational life, how we serve others in our homes, our jobs or at school, in our communities, and our church. As we go about those vocations God gives us, we show our love for Him and provide help for our neighbors. God is at work in the patterns of vocations for providing for everyone's needs. Best of all, God is at work for us in our patterns of worship. The Divine Service is God's service to us. It's His deliverance to us of the forgiveness for all our sins won for us through the perfect life, substitutionary death, and glorious resurrection of God's Son, Jesus Christ for us. God delivers and applies this forgiveness to us personally when we hear the words of Christ's absolution forgiving us of all of our sins, "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit."

Still another pattern in our worship, where God is at work for us in the best way possible: When we come forward to receive the Lord's Supper we can know that God's hand has **not** gone out against us, as Naomi had said, but rather His hand reaches **down** to us, in love, to deliver the gifts of forgiveness, life, and salvation that Jesus perfectly and completely won for us.

And so, whenever you feel disillusioned with life, even bitter, so much so that maybe you're not even sure that you should be participating in the church anymore, because you feel that you don't belong or that you believe God is working against you rather than for you. Remember Naomi and what God can do for the disillusioned and disheartened. And what is that? He brings you and I, along with Naomi, deeper into those patterns of life and belief that He's established for us. So as you live out your days, you discover anew that God **has been**, and always **will be**, right there caring for you.

Let's go back to Naomi one last time. Remember how at the end of the story Naomi is holding her grandson on her lap? That's certainly a happy ending, isn't it? (If you're a grandparent, you especially know what I mean!) What a complete change God worked in Naomi's life!

She had been extremely bitter and sad when her husband and her sons died, but now... she has a grandchild. What is more, she has a son-in-law in Boaz to take care of her and her family. And of course, Naomi still has faithful and loving Ruth who has been one of God's great blessings to her all along. A happy ending, indeed!

But the story of Naomi and Ruth doesn't actually end there. We read at the end of Ruth chapter 4, that Ruth's son had a son, and **that** son had a son. And that last one, Ruth's great-grandson, was David, **King** David. Interesting! And yet

that still isn't quite the end of the story. David had a son and a grandson, and so on. And where did this end up? We can find out by reading Matthew chapter 1. Yes, the whole story of Ruth leads to Jesus, Who came to give us a life that is ***perfect*** in true joy and happiness. Now ***there's*** the reason we can ***all*** have a real happy ending. Or more precisely, ***ours*** will be an ***ending*** that ***never*** ends.' (Ibid, p. 314). Thanks be to God! Amen.