

**MINISTRY BY MAIL**  
**Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship**  
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**First Sunday in Advent, December 1, 2019**

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 428,413:5,424:1-5, 521:1-4, 67:6-7.

Lessons: Leviticus 25:23-28, Revelation 2:10 Proverbs 3:5-6 Luke 18:29-34.

Sermon Text: Ruth 4:13-17.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Bethlehem in Judea is a town that plays a very important role in the life of our Savior. It was a town in Palestine, six miles south of Jerusalem in Bible times. It is the place where Rachel, the most-loved wife of Jacob died and was buried. It is the location where the book of Ruth takes place. The history of Ruth leads to the events that gave major importance to the village as the home and place of anointing of David as King over Israel. It is, of course, also the city or town where Jesus was born.

God's people will experience loss and difficulties and they will struggle to see hope for good to come out of it. But God works in the lives of individuals to carry out wonderful plans for the eternal good of many souls. In the history of Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi, we find that

**THE LORD GUIDES HIS PEOPLE THROUGH ADVERSITY**

1. **God blesses a faithful widow.**
2. **God's actions with his faithful people produce many rich blessings.**
3. **We, too, must rely on God for blessings.**

This history took place during the time of the Judges. God tells us in Judges 17: ***"In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit."*** Judges 17:6 (NIV)

The book of Judges showed God's faithfulness even when his people were unfaithful to him. The book of Ruth shows that despite the wickedness even among God's people, one Gentile and a few Israelites faithfully followed God's will and were richly blessed for it.

The book of Ruth begins as an Israelite family leaves their home because of famine in the land to live for a while in the heathen country of Moab. Naomi's two sons marry Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. First Elimelech, the head of the household, dies, leaving Naomi a widow. Then over a span of 10 years, the two sons die, leaving all three women as widows.

When Naomi hears that her homeland has been released from famine she sets out with her two daughters in law, Orpah and Ruth, to return to Bethlehem. Naomi is discouraged by her situation and doesn't know how she could support her daughters in law, so she blessed them, and urged them to return to their parents' homes where they could be supported and more likely find new husbands. Naomi's blessing implies that Orpah and Ruth knew about the true God. But her urging them to return to their families who likely worshipped false gods, shows her own struggling faith in the true God.

Both daughters said that they would return with Naomi to Bethlehem to Naomi's people. Women generally depended on husbands to support them. Naomi wouldn't be able to provide her daughters-in-law with husbands for support and the joys of marriage. Naomi felt sorry for her daughters in law because of how the Lord had treated her and them thus far.

Orpah returned to her parents' house and their gods. But Ruth clung to Naomi and didn't want to return and said ***"Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me."*** When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her." Ruth 1:16-18 (NIV)

Ruth is willing to accept whatever Naomi's circumstances would be and to worship Naomi's God so that they might be together until death separates them. Naomi accepts Ruth's determination to remain with her and stops arguing with her about it.

When they arrive in Bethlehem together, Naomi expresses her discouragement to those who knew her by asking for a different name. Instead of Naomi which means "pleasant," she wished to be called Mara which means "bitter." ***"Don't call me Naomi," she told them. 'Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The LORD has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.'***" Ruth 1:20-21 (NIV)

Isn't this often our attitude when things don't go the way we expect? It is human nature, sinful human nature to want to blame God for all the bad things that happen in our lives.

Now God through the civil laws which he set up for Israel had provided a way for the widows, orphans and poor to be fed. We begin to see in this that God blesses a faithful widow.

They were allowed to go into the fields, vineyards, and olive groves at harvest time and gather whatever was left by the reapers. Ruth asked Naomi's permission to make use of that provision on their behalf. ***"So she went out and began to glean in the fields behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech. Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, 'The LORD be with you!' 'The LORD bless you!' they called back."*** Ruth 2:3-4 (NIV)

These greetings Boaz exchanged with his servants showed that they worshipped the Lord. Boaz noticed Ruth and asked his servant who she was. ***"The foreman replied, 'She is the Moabitess who came back from Moab with Naomi. She said, 'Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters.' She went into the field and has worked steadily from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter."*** Ruth 2:6-7 (NIV)

Boaz is kind to Ruth and treats her like one of his own servant girls. She wondered why he would treat a foreigner so well. Boaz explains ***"I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband--how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge."*** Ruth 2:11-12 (NIV) Boaz continues to show extra favor to Ruth. She brought home to Naomi a generous portion of barley.

Naomi, upon hearing the good report about Boaz from Ruth, began to see again the Lord's blessings upon them. ***"Her mother-in-law asked her, 'Where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be the man who took notice of you!' Then Ruth told her mother-in-law about the one at whose place she had been working. 'The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz,' she said. 'The LORD bless him!' Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. 'He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead.' She added, 'That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers.'"*** Ruth 2:19-20 (NIV)

Naomi then encouraged Ruth to make use of the opportunity for protection and extra care that the Lord provided. And Ruth faithfully did what Naomi and God wanted. This continued for a few months, from about the time of Passover through Pentecost.

Naomi proposed that Ruth make good use of the special laws God had provided to keep land within the family line of inheritance. God's civil law which you heard in our Old Testament lesson said that close relatives had to buy back land that their poor relatives had sold in order to make sure that every family maintained an inheritance within the Promised Land. But, if later a male heir came of age, the land would be returned to the male heir and the relative who bought it would lose the redemption price of the land. This was one of the ways that God sustained the family line for the Promised Savior.

Naomi wondered if perhaps Boaz would serve as a "kinsman-redeemer" who would pay a good price for Naomi's and Elimelech's inherited land. And if Boaz should choose to marry Ruth and they had a boy, then their heir would receive the land back that had been Elimelech's. So Naomi instructed Ruth to look her most attractive and visit Boaz in the night when he was feeling good after a hard day's work and a good supper. Then Ruth should propose marriage to him and suggest he perform the duties of the kinsman-redeemer.

Ruth agrees and does what Naomi tells her to do. She proposes marriage to Boaz. Boaz is happy to accept the proposal of marriage but realizes that a nearer kinsman, that is, a relative, may wish to buy the land first. But if the other does not, Boaz also promises to buy the land for Naomi. They spend the rest of the night together virtuously.

In the morning ***“Boaz took ten of the elders of the town and said, ‘Sit here,’ and they did so. Then he said to the kinsman-redeemer, ‘Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our brother Elimelech. I thought I should bring the matter to your attention and suggest that you buy it in the presence of these seated here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, do so. But if you will not, tell me, so I will know. For no one has the right to do it except you, and I am next in line.’ ‘I will redeem it,’ he said. Then Boaz said, ‘On the day you buy the land from Naomi and from Ruth the Moabitess, you acquire the dead man’s widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property.’ At this, the kinsman-redeemer said, ‘Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it.’”*** Ruth 4:2-6 (NIV)

True to Naomi’s hope, Boaz carries through on the plan. Boaz reviews before his witnesses the entire transaction so that all would know and accept the legal standing of the arrangements. The witnesses in turn accept their duties as witnesses and then congratulate Boaz, giving him their blessings on his marriage to Ruth. The Lord did indeed bless Boaz and Ruth with at least one son. The women of the town who witnessed Naomi’s sorrow when she came to the city, rejoiced with her, praising the Lord who had provided a grandson for her in her old age through Ruth. They hoped that as Naomi cared for the child, both of them would be blessed by it.

The book of Ruth closes with an abbreviated genealogy, ending with these words: ***“Boaz [was] the father of Obed, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David.”*** Ruth 4:21-22 (NIV)

These final verses with their genealogy carry an important gospel message. They show that God included Gentiles into the line of David, the great king of Israel, and ultimately the blood line of Jesus our Savior, for Jesus would also be a Savior for Gentiles as well as for the faithful of Israel.

We don’t always see what God has in mind for us. Our sinful desires often get in the way, but we must always rely on God.

Naomi began this lesson discouraged and grieving because of the loss of her husband and sons. She didn’t see what good God would have in store for her. But as God through Boaz’s faithful service to God and Ruth provided for her, she found cause for rejoicing. And through the previous losses for Naomi, God was able to bring a Gentile woman, Ruth, to faith and into the line of the Savior, which plainly shows God’s mercy for Gentiles as well.

Ruth came from a family that did not believe in God. She lived part of her adult life in a country that worshipped false gods, and moved to a country where many formerly faithful people had turned away from the true God. Yet God brought her to faith in him as her Lord and Savior. We can see the influence of Naomi in bringing Ruth to faith in the true God. We can see the influence of Boaz in strengthening her faith. God gave her the strength then to trust in him despite many outward pressures to turn away from him. She faithfully followed God while she steadfastly remained with Naomi,

Ruth walked by faith in the true God and turned her back on what at the time seemed better prospects of her parents’ home. She walked by faith to serve Naomi, despite Naomi’s initial attempts to dissuade her. She walked by faith as she set out to provide for Naomi in the God-pleasing, God-given work of gleaning. And she walked by faith into the arms of faithful Boaz, not knowing if she might be rejected by him, trusting God that Boaz would do what was best. And God blessed her in ways she probably had never imagined. For her honor and respect to Naomi as well as her faithfulness and trust in God, Ruth received the blessing of long life promised in the Fourth Commandment, as well as other blessings of faith in the promised Savior. So, although walking by faith may mean sacrifices, meeting with resistance, requiring hard work and dedication, and asking you to risk yourself for the sake of God’s will, God will work through your faith-walk to bless you and others.

If God can be with Naomi and Ruth, who walked by faith when things seemed especially bleak, surely he can be with us. This history is only part of the Gospel found in the Old Testament, which leads to the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ in Bethlehem.

May we always walk by faith and set aside our own sinful desires. God grant this. Amen.

