

**Ruth 1:16-17, 20-21,
3:18a, 4:18-22
February 12, '17**

“FEARLESS LOVE”

**I HOPE THE SCRIPTURE READING THAT IS LISTED
IN THE BULLETIN HASN'T CAUSED YOU A GREAT DEAL
OF CONSTERNATION.**

**NO, I DON'T PLAN ON READING THE ENTIRE BOOK
OF RUTH THIS MORNING.**

**I DO HOPE, THOUGH, THAT YOU HAVE EITHER
READ IT THIS PAST WEEK OR WILL DO SO IN THE
WEEK AHEAD.**

**IT'S JUST 4 CHAPTERS AND WON'T TAKE MORE
THAN 15 MINUTES TO READ.**

**IT'S A GOOD TIME TO READ IT BECAUSE, WITH
VALENTINE'S DAY FALLING IN JUST TWO DAYS,
THERE IS PERHAPS NO GREATER LOVE STORY IN –
NOT ONLY THE BIBLE – BUT IN ALL OF LITERATURE.**

**IT'S A STORY OF ROMANTIC LOVE & LOYAL LOVE
AND IN THE CASE OF BOTH, IT'S A STORY OF
"FEARLESS LOVE."**

**HERE'S A QUICK THREE MINUTE SYNOPSIS OF THE
BOOK OF RUTH IN CASE YOU DON'T REMEMBER IT.**

**IT STARTS OFF WITH A JEWISH FAMILY FROM
THE CITY OF BETHLEHEM WHO, IRONICALLY, HAD TO
LEAVE BECAUSE OF A HORRIBLE FAMINE.**

**I SAY "IRONICALLY," BECAUSE BETHLEHEM
MEANS "THE HOUSE OF BREAD."**

**THEY FLED TO THE FOREIGN LAND OF MOAB &
YOU KNOW THINGS HAD TO BE REALLY BAD IN
ISRAEL BECAUSE NO ONE FROM ISRAEL WOULD GO
TO MOAB UNLESS THEY HAD ABSOLUTELY,
POSITIVELY NOWHERE ELSE TO GO!**

**THIS FAMILY – ELIMELECH & NAOMI – HAD TWO
SONS & BOTH SONS MARRIED MOABITE GIRLS –
ORPAH & RUTH - AND THEY ALL SETTLED IN FOR THE
LONG HAUL IN THEIR NEW HOME.**

**SADLY, THOUGH, ELIMELECH DIED AND THEN
ADDING TO THE FAMILY’S SADNESS, BOTH BOYS DIED
AS WELL.**

**THIS LEFT THREE WIDOWS IN A TIME & A LAND
WHEN IT WAS VERY DIFFICULT FOR A WIDOW TO
SURVIVE.**

**NAOMI DECIDED THAT, SINCE THE FAMINE HAD
ENDED IN BETHLEHEM, SHE’D RETURN HOME ON HER
OWN.**

**SHE TOLD ORPAH & RUTH TO REMAIN IN MOAB &
FIND NEW HUSBANDS TO MARRY.**

**THE TWO YOUNG WOMEN, THOUGH, WERE
DEDICATED TO THEIR MOTHER-IN-LAW & TOLD HER
THEY'D GO BACK TO ISRAEL WITH HER.**

**BUT NAOMI INSISTED & ORPAH FINALLY GAVE IN
& RETURNED HOME TO MOAB.**

NOT RUTH.

SHE REFUSED.

**NAOMI FIRMLY TOLD RUTH SHE HAD TO GO BACK
BUT NEVERTHELESS, SHE PERSISTED & NAOMI
REALIZED HER DAUGHTER-IN-LAW WAS A STRONG,
OUTSPOKEN WOMAN WHO WASN'T ABOUT TO BE
DENIED WHEN SHE KNEW SHE WAS DOING THE RIGHT
THING.**

**IN ISRAEL, RUTH FINDS FAVOR WITH A RICH,
YOUNG MAN NAMED BOAZ, WHO JUST HAPPENS TO BE
A RELATIVE OF NAOMI.**

THROUGH A SET OF PROVIDENTIAL, GRACIOUS & VERY ROMANTIC CIRCUMSTANCES, BOAZ IS ABLE TO NOT ONLY TAKE RUTH AS HIS WIFE, BUT SECURE NAOMI'S PROPERTY AS WELL.

THIS TALE HAS A VERY HAPPY ENDING BECAUSE RUTH & BOAZ HAVE A CHILD & SEVERAL GENERATIONS DOWN THE ROAD, DAVID – AS IN *KING DAVID* - IS BORN.

THIS IS AN ABSOLUTELY GLORIOUS STORY BUT IN READING IT, YOU HAVE TO WONDER WHY IT'S INCLUDED IN THE BIBLE.

WHAT ARE THE POINTS TO PONDER?

WHAT ARE THE LESSONS TO BE LEARNED?

PERHAPS IF WE TAKE A LOOK AT SOME OF THE SPECIFIC PASSAGES THAT ARE FOUND IN RUTH WE'LL BE ABLE TO DISCOVER THE ANSWER – SOME OF THE

**POINTS OF THE BOOK, SOME OF THE LESSONS IT
TEACHES US & WHY THE STORY OF RUTH CAN BE
CLASSIFIED AS A STORY OF “FEARLESS LOVE.”**

**LET’S START WITH THE MOST WELL-KNOWN
VERSES – VERSES THAT ONE MIGHT THINK WOULD BE
A REASON TO USE THE STORY OF RUTH ON
VALENTINE’S DAY.**

**OTHER THAN PAUL’S LOVE CHAPTER IN I
CORINTHIANS 13, WORDS FROM THE BOOK OF RUTH
ARE PROBABLY THE MOST-FREQUENTLY USED
WORDS OF SCRIPTURE IN WEDDING CEREMONIES.**

**THEY’RE FOUND IN THE FIRST CHAPTER &
THEY’RE CERTAINLY APPROPRIATE FOR A WEDDING
CEREMONY – BUT NOT IN THE CONTEXT IN WHICH
THE WORDS ARE SPOKEN.**

WHEN RUTH STANDS FIRM IN HER COMMITMENT TO HER MOTHER-IN-LAW, NAOMI, AND WHEN SHE REFUSES TO LEAVE HER, SHE SAYS, “DO NOT PRESS ME TO LEAVE YOU OR TO TURN BACK FROM FOLLOWING YOU! WHERE YOU GO, I WILL GO; WHERE YOU LODGE, I WILL LODGE; YOUR PEOPLE SHALL BE MY PEOPLE, AND YOUR GOD MY GOD. WHERE YOU DIE, I WILL DIE – THERE WILL I BE BURIED. MAY THE LORD DO THIS AND SO TO ME, AND MORE AS WELL, IF EVEN DEATH PARTS ME FROM YOU!”

THAT’S A PRETTY SERIOUS & DEFINITIVE STATEMENT OF LOVE FOR ANOTHER PERSON.

IF YOU SIMPLY TAKE THOSE WORDS, REGARDLESS OF THE RELATIONSHIP – DAUGHTER-IN-LAW TO MOTHER-LAW, NEWLY-WED TO NEWLY-WED,

**FRIEND TO FRIEND – THIS IS A POWERFUL
STATEMENT OF LOVE & COMMITMENT.**

**IN THIS SPECIFIC SITUATION, IT WAS AN
INCREDIBLE STATEMENT OF “FEARLESS LOVE.”**

REMEMBER – RUTH WAS A MOABITE.

SHE WAS A FOREIGNER.

SHE WAS A WIDOW FOREIGNER.

**SHE WOULD BE TRAVELING TO A LAND WHERE
HER KIND WERE FEARED & DESPISED.**

HOW WOULD SHE BE TREATED?

**WOULD SHE BE ACCEPTED & WELCOMED OR
REJECTED & SHUNNED?**

**IN HER COMMITMENT TO NAOMI, RUTH DISPLAYS
THE CONSUMMATE EXAMPLE OF “FEARLESS LOVE” IN
THE FACE OF AN UNKNOWN FUTURE THAT AWAITS
HER.**

**BUT IT'S NOT ONLY RUTH WHO REPRESENTS
“FEARLESS LOVE” IN THIS STORY.**

CONSIDER WHAT BOAZ WAS WILLING TO DO.

**RUTH WAS A FOREIGNER ENTERING THE LAND OF
ISRAEL – AND NOT JUST A FOREIGNER, BUT A
FOREIGNER FROM THE HATED LAND OF MOAB!**

**THE PREVAILING ATTITUDE TOWARD HER
WOULD BE ONE OF SCORN & REJECTION.**

**BUT LISTEN TO THIS - *“BOAZ INSTRUCTED HIS
YOUNG MEN, ‘LET HER GLEAN EVEN AMONG THE
STANDING SHEAVES, AND DO NOT REPROACH HER. YOU
MUST ALSO PULL OUT SOME HANDFULS FOR HER FROM
THE BUNDLES, AND LEAVE THEM FOR HER TO GLEAN,
AND DO NOT REBUKE HER.’”***

CAN YOU PICTURE THIS SCENE?

**HE STANDS IN FRONT OF A GROUP OF TOUGH,
MACHO-TYPE FARM WORKERS & SAYS:**

***“I’VE HEARD WHAT YOU’VE BEEN SAYING ABOUT
THIS FOREIGNER. I’VE HEARD YOUR RIDICULE & YOUR
SCORN. I’VE LISTENED AS YOU WHISPERED INSULTS &
INSINUATIONS. BUT I’LL NOT STAND FOR IT. YOU’LL
WELCOME THIS FOREIGNER & YOU’LL TREAT HER WITH
GREAT RESPECT.”***

**THE “FEARLESS LOVE” OF BOAZ & THE
“FEARLESS LOVE” OF RUTH ARE LITERALLY A MATCH
MADE IN HEAVEN (AND YES, I MEAN THAT IN THE
‘LITERAL’ SENSE)!**

**LET’S STOP FOR A MINUTE & CONSIDER THE
CONTRASTING ATTITUDES & ACTIONS IN BOTH OF
THESE SITUATIONS.**

FIRST OF ALL, THERE'S RUTH'S PERSISTENCE IN STAYING WITH NAOMI.

REMEMBER – THERE WAS ANOTHER DAUGHTER-IN-LAW.

AS YOU FLIP THROUGH THE PAGES OF YOUR BIBLE THOUGH, YOU DON'T COME ACROSS “THE BOOK OF ORPAH.”

REMEMBER – SHE'S THE OTHER DAUGHTER-IN-LAW – THE ONE WHO DISPLAYED GOOD, COMMON SENSE IN LISTENING TO NAOMI & RETURNING BACK HOME.

WE CAN'T BE CRITICAL OF ORPAH.

SHE DID ABSOLUTELY NOTHING WRONG.

IF YOU RECALL, BOTH SHE & RUTH WERE INITIALLY PLANNING TO TRAVEL TO ISRAEL WITH NAOMI.

SHE DEARLY LOVED HER MOTHER-IN-LAW.

SHE WAS COMMITTED TO HER.

**BUT WHEN THINGS GOT A BIT DICEY – AS SHE
CONSIDERED WHAT DIFFICULTIES SHE MIGHT
ENCOUNTER IN MOVING FORWARD – COMMON SENSE
TOOK OVER & IT WAS A RISK SHE WASN'T WILLING
TO TAKE.**

AGAIN, WE CAN'T CRITICIZE ORPAH.

**AFTER ALL, AREN'T MOST OF US, MOST OF THE
TIME MORE LIKE ORPAH THAN WE ARE LIKE RUTH?**

PLAY IT SAFE.

DON'T TAKE UNNECESSARY RISKS.

**DON'T BE FOOLISH IN OUR ACTIONS OR RECKLESS
IN OUR EMOTIONS.**

**YOU KNOW, I THINK IF WE JUMP FROM THIS
STORY IN THE OLD TESTAMENT TO THE TEACHINGS**

OF JESUS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT, THIS IS REALLY WHY HIS WORDS WERE SO DIFFICULT TO ACCEPT.

HE CALLED PEOPLE TO QUIT PLAYING IT SAFE.

HE CHALLENGED PEOPLE TO TAKE RISKS.

HE SUGGESTED & HE DISPLAYED FOOLISH ACTIONS & RECKLESS EMOTIONS.

IN ESSENCE, THE MESSAGE OF JESUS WAS A CALL TO “FEARLESS LOVE.”

THOSE WHO HEARD THAT CALL, THOSE WHO ACCEPTED HIS CHALLENGES – THOSE WHO ABANDONED THEIR FEARS & EMBRACED HIS COMPLETE COMMITMENT TO “FEARLESS LOVE” - WERE LEFT WITH AN UNDERSTANDING OF HOW ABSOLUTELY TRAGIC & PITIFUL THEIR LIFE WOULD HAVE BEEN HAD THEY NOT DONE SO!

AGAIN, THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH PLAYING IT SAFE – NOTHING WRONG WITH USING COMMON SENSE.

BUT THINK ABOUT IT – DO YOU WANT TO BE A RUTH OR ARE YOU SATISFIED BEING AN ORPAH?

IN YOUR RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHERS, DOES THE IDEA OF EXPRESSING “FEARLESS LOVE” ATTRACT YOU OR FRIGHTEN YOU?

THE SITUATION WITH BOAZ IS QUITE SIMILAR.

WHILE ORPAH REPRESENTS THE CONTRAST TO RUTH, THE YOUNG WORKERS REPRESENT THE CONTRAST TO BOAZ.

AGAIN, THERE'S REALLY NOTHING FUNDAMENTALLY WRONG WITH WHAT WE READ OF THEM.

FAIR IS FAIR.

THEY WERE LIVING IN ISRAEL & THEIR LAND WAS THEIR LAND.

WHY SHOULD THEY BE WELCOMING & ACCEPTING OF THIS FOREIGNER WHO WAS COMING IN TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THEIR LAND & THEIR CROPS?

THEY WERE DOING THE COMMON SENSE THING TO DO – THE SAFE THING – THE RISK-FREE THING.

THERE IS NOTHING AT ALL FUNDAMENTALLY WRONG WITH THEIR ATTITUDES OR THEIR ACTIONS.

BUT I’M QUITE CERTAIN THAT BOAZ – LIKE THOSE WHO LATER ACCEPTED THE CHALLENGES SET FORTH BY JESUS – WOULD SAY THAT WHEN HE ABANDONED HIS FEARS & WHEN HE EMBRACED A COMPLETE COMMITMENT TO “FEARLESS LOVE,” HE WAS LEFT WITH AN UNDERSTANDING OF HOW

**TRAGIC & PITIFUL HIS LIFE WOULD HAVE BEEN HAD
HE NOT DONE SO!**

**BOTH RUTH & BOAZ TEACH US VALUABLE
LESSONS ABOUT “FEARLESS LOVE” AND WHY THIS
STORY IS INCLUDED IN THE BIBLE.**

**BUT I THINK, IN AN INDIRECT WAY, THE THIRD
CHARACTER IN THE STORY TEACHES THAT SAME
LESSON IN AN EVEN MORE POWERFUL WAY.**

**AS WE LOOK AT THE PROGRESSION OF NAOMI
THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE BOOK, WE FIND A
MAGNIFICENT UNDERCURRENT OF “FEARLESS LOVE”
IN AN EVEN MORE POWERFUL FASHION.**

**REMEMBER HOW BLEAK THE FUTURE LOOKED
FOR NAOMI.**

**SHE’D LEFT HOME & WAS LIVING IN A FOREIGN
LAND.**

**HER HUSBAND DIED & THEN BOTH OF HER SONS
DIED.**

**CAN YOU POSSIBLY FATHOM HOW GRIEFSTRUCK
SHE MUST HAVE BEEN?!**

**EVEN THE DEDICATED “FEARLESS LOVE” OF
RUTH CAN’T LIFT HER FROM HER ANGUISH &
DESPAIR.**

**AS THEY RETURN TO ISRAEL AND AS SHE
ENCOUNTERS THE FRIENDS SHE HAD LEFT, SHE SAYS
IN THE SECOND CHAPTER, “*CALL ME NO LONGER
NAOMI, CALL ME MARA, FOR THE ALMIGHTY HAS DEALT
BITTERLY WITH ME. I WENT AWAY FULL, BUT THE LORD
HAS BROUGHT ME BACK EMPTY; WHY CALL ME NAOMI
WHEN THE LORD HAS DEALT HARSHLY WITH ME, AND
THE ALMIGHTY HAS BROUGHT CALAMITY UPON ME?*”**

SOMEONE HAS SUGGESTED THAT WHAT NAOMI IS SAYING IS, “*DON’T CALL ME SWEETIE – CALL ME SOURPUSS!*”

THAT’S WHAT SHE HAD BECOME – A SOURPUSS.

BUT MOVE A BIT AHEAD IN THE STORY WHEN IT APPEARS AS THOUGH THINGS ARE QUITE POSSIBLY GOING TO TURN AROUND FOR HER.

IN THE THIRD CHAPTER, SHE SAYS TO RUTH, “*WAIT, MY DAUGHTER, UNTIL YOU LEARN HOW THE MATTER TURNS OUT...*”

WHAT NAOMI HAS BEGUN TO UNDERSTAND IS THAT GOD ISN’T FINISHED WITH THINGS YET.

THAT DARK, BLEAK, HORRIFIC FUTURE THAT NAOMI FACED HAS BEGUN TO LOOK A BIT BRIGHTER, A BIT ROSIER, A BIT MORE HOPEFUL.

AND THEN WE MOVE TO THE VERY END OF THE STORY.

THE CLOSING WORDS, WHEN THEY WERE FIRST WRITTEN, WOULDN'T BE FULLY UNDERSTOOD FOR HUNDREDS UPON HUNDREDS OF YEARS.

WE ARE GIVEN – IN THE CLOSING WORDS OF THE BOOK OF RUTH – THE FUTURE GENERATIONS OF NAOMI.

WE READ, “*THEY NAMED HIM OBED; HE BECAME THE FATHER OF JESSE, THE FATHER OF DAVID.*”

WE KNOW WHO ONE OF THE DESCENDANTS OF DAVID WAS – A CHILD BORN IN BETHLEHEM TO MARY & JOSEPH.

IT WAS THE “FEARLESS LOVE” OF GOD THAT WAS AT WORK IN THE LIFE OF NAOMI, TAKING THE CRUELEST BLOWS IMAGINABLE & TURNING THAT

**HEARTACHE INTO SOMETHING GOOD – SOMETHING
THAT WOULD TRANSFORM THE ENTIRE WORLD.**

**THAT IS YET ANOTHER POWERFUL MESSAGE
FROM THE BOOK OF RUTH.**

**NO MATTER HOW BLEAK THE FUTURE LOOKS, NO
MATTER HOW DARK THE CLOUDS THAT HANG ABOVE
YOU, GOD IS AT WORK IN YOUR OWN STORY – READY
TO TAKE THE CRUELEST BLOWS IMAGINABLE &
SOMEHOW – SOME WAY – TRANSFORM THEM INTO
SOMETHING GOOD.**

**MAY THE “FEARLESS LOVE” OF RUTH, THE
“FEARLESS LOVE” OF BOAZ & PRIMARILY THE
“FEARLESS LOVE” OF ALMIGHTY GOD GUIDE US AS
WE SEEK TO EXTEND “FEARLESS LOVE” OURSELVES.
AMEN.**

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