

November 3rd 2024

Sermon: There is room for all. Ruth 1:1-18.

Prayer: Gracious God, we are thankful that you came to live with us and die for us. You proved your power over death when you rose again. May we be living testimony to the hope and assurance of eternal life that we have in you? Amen.

Introduction: The rhythm of the weather pattern is changing. It is the time of the year when we are transitioning to the colder days. We see less hours of the sunshine, more gloomy clouds and we change our garments to suit the weather pattern. With each changing season we collectively go through a transition. It is also true that each one of us goes through a transition on life's journey.

The book of Ruth gives us a glimpse of the sovereign God as Elimelech, Naomi, their two sons – Mahlon and Chilion left their home in Bethlehem and went to the country of Moab. While they were there, the two sons got married to Moabite women. After ten years they were childless. The two sons and their father died. They left behind Naomi and her two daughters-in-law- Orpah and Ruth. These three women grieved their loss. They shed tears, lament and supported each other throughout their time together. Orpah returned to her family. Ruth made a powerful confession of the Sovereign God she encountered in Naomi.

“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 I will be buried.

May the Lord do thus and more so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!” (v 16&17). Ruth was determined to follow Naomi and she transitioned to a new country. She crossed the borders of the Territory of Moab to Judah and took refuge in Bethlehem. As the story developed in the remaining chapters we learned that Ruth a foreigner and a refugee was the great grand-mother to King David. This is the lineage to which Jesus was born. (Ruth and Boaz got Obed, Obed got Jesse, and Jesse got King David)

God's promise to be with us is fulfilled in unique and extraordinary ways.

In the poem Home by Warsan Shire a British poet born to Somali parents writes:

“No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark

You only run for the border when you see the whole city running as well.”

The background to Shire's poem is war in her homeland, people running for a safe place to take refuge. In her poem the images of home are distorted and to run seems the safest thing to do.

The background to the text from Ruth is not about running from a war but searching for a place to take refuge in the God who promised to be with you. Elimelech and his family were in search for a life that promised better economic security. There was a famine in Judah and Bethlehem which means “House of bread” was without bread for daily sustenance.

Have you ever wonder if there were walls at the border? Were there border security officers and tons of immigration forms to complete? Have you ever wonder about the complexity and scrutiny of the laws to cross a border for the sole purpose of human survival? How to find a warm welcome and a place to call home? What are the challenges of those seeking refuge to use their skills and knowledge to provide food for one’s family? Have you ever pondered those questions in this story?

Three things come to my mind in this story that has relevance for today’s context. 1. Economic security, 2. A place to take refuge called immigration 3. A place to live –housing.

Like me and many others who came in search of a better economic life have experienced some of those challenges. Currently, we are aware of the socio-economic and political situation as we grapple with just these three highlighted concerns: Economic security, immigration and housing.

A brief background to our context today reminded us that in 2015 the Harper Government had put tools and systems in place to welcome the Syrian refugees but we know that Liberals also campaigned on that platform. Over the years the government expanded on those structures and policies to increase the immigration numbers. Many engineers, skilled and professional workers, home –care-givers and all different fields of employment crossed the borders to Canada. Canada welcomed many thousands of immigrants from Ukraine, Africa, Philippines, Europe and many more. The economic growth happened as well as housing development. Many people became wealthy with the sale of land and industries boomed.

Then the unexpected happened. Not a famine, not a war. Covid -19 happened and the world stood still for two years. Today the aftermath of such destruction to human life is resulting in some of the same issues in this story: The leaders of church and society are searching to find a way forward. Who has the right answers? What are the solutions, policies, structural economic conversations that will offer hope and growth for the nation? I am not a politician. However, as people of the faith it is important that we open these subjects for conversation within our context at all levels. We are the voice of the voiceless.

Ruth and Naomi offer us some hope and determination. Ruth was a stranger to the community. She faced the challenges of isolation and rejection. After Boaz reaped his crops then Ruth gleaned in the fields and bundled the leftovers to provide for herself and Naomi. Is this picture similar to new-comers who have to work many shifts and limited hours in order to provide for their family? Not to mention the transitioned process to learning new language, adapting to cultural differences, weather patterns and more.

What do we learn of Naomi? She went to a foreign forsaken place.

In 2023, Ken and I had a glimpse of Moab. It still looks dreary.

I recalled the many warnings and comments from friends about crossing the border to Jordan. Many spoke of being search, delayed and items taken away. We were fortunate as tourists and the experience was different. It was more like crossing our border to go south. Naomi filled with grief and lament. Grief isolates people. Some people grieve differently with family and relationships. We live in culture where we hear move on but death is reality that sucks at life. No one understood Naomi's grief, as Ruth did and they wept and lament deeply together. Grief and trauma isolate people.

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On the run we remember today that God's promise to be with us is fulfilled in the ordinary things of life. We are fed with spiritual food-the bread and the cup of life on this table. Herein is the mystery and power of the one who promised to be with us in search for economic security, a place to take refuge and a place to call home. God knows our pain and grief, illness and trauma. God weeps deeply with each one. God comes here among us because God wants to live among us. There is room for all at God's table.

Jesus died on the cross and broke out of the tomb to bring new life. It is the Good News to hold on to the true ending of your story and my story, as we listen to God's story. So it doesn't matter if you will cross border to live somewhere, or if Jesus will come again to dwell with you. Either way you will be in God's presence where all things are made new.

"In life, in death, in life beyond death, God is with us!" Amen

Intercessor Prayers: November 3rd

Gracious God, we know that with the harvest comes the winter. We know how hard life can be where there is not enough to go around; when food runs short, when sickness lays us low, when violence threatens to take our joy, comfort and hope. We remember those who suffer from chronic depression. Come Holy Spirit and be our counselor. God in your mercy, **Response: hear us!**

We pray for healing, for those who are sick and those who have no one care for them. Grant food to those who are hungry and need nourishment that only you can bring. Provide for the little ones so that they too can have a place at the table. Hear our concerns for those who need a place to call home and in search of economic security.

Compassionate God, for those grieve the loss of loved ones; console the broken hearted. Grant protection to our children everywhere traveling by road, water and air. We remember people that are faced with natural disasters.... We pray for our neighbours south of the border during this

difficult socio-economic and political transition. We give thanks for your Spirit who reigns over creation for justice and peace to prevail. Help us to resist evil. We pray for those we know and do not know. God in your mercy, **Response: hear us!**

God of love continue to bless this ministry at Bolton community. We are thankful for all the resources; music, people and finances. Jesus we join with you in saving lives in this community and beyond. We pray: Our Father

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