

October 12, 2025 – Ruth 1:1-19a

Our Old Testament lesson today begins in the days when the judges ruled. A time of famine. A time of chaos. A time when, as the book of Judges tells us, *“everyone did what was right in his own eyes.”* And in the midst of this famine, a family left their home. Ironically, they were from Bethlehem, which literally means “the house of bread.” But there was no bread in these houses. There was no food at all.

And so Elimelech took his wife Naomi and their two sons and went to live in the land of Moab. It was a practical decision: there was food there. But sometimes the practical thing is not the faithful thing. Moab was the land of Israel’s enemies. The Moabites had seduced Israel into idolatry generations earlier. Their god was not the Lord. Their gods were nothing like the Lord.

Still, Elimelech went. And there in Moab, tragedy struck. Elimelech died. Naomi was left with her two sons. They took Moabite wives – Orpah and Ruth – and for ten years they lived there. But then both of those sons died too. Now there were three widows, alone in a foreign land, with no husbands, no sons, and no future.

It’s hard to imagine a more desperate beginning to a story. This is not a fairy tale opening. It’s a picture of despair. Naomi has lost everything. She’s ready to head home. Naomi has heard that the Lord has *“visited His people and given them food.”* So she sets out.

But she doesn’t expect anything good from God anymore. When her daughters-in-law start to follow, she turns and says, *“Go back. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me.”* It sounds pious, at first. But it’s actually spoken in despair. *“The Lord’s hand has gone out against me,”* she says. In other words: “Don’t come with me. You’ll only get swept up in more suffering. That’s all my God has left for me.”

There are different kinds of unbelief. The first kind is the unbelief most people think of: the outright rejection of God’s existence. It says, “There is no God. The world runs on its own. I will live as I please.” That unbelief is loud and proud, denying the Creator entirely.

But there is another kind, quieter and sadder, and just as common. It’s the unbelief that still acknowledges God’s exist and even His power, but doubts His goodness. It says, “Yes, God exists, but He must have turned against me. He must be angry. He must have forgotten me.”

That was Naomi’s unbelief. She still used the Lord’s name, still spoke of His providence, but she no longer trusted His heart. Her faith had become hollow. Her hope had gone cold. That, too, is unbelief. A faith that no longer trusts in God’s love.

And then, in the middle of this hopeless scene, Ruth speaks. Orpah kisses Naomi and returns to her people and her gods, but Ruth does not. *“Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you,”* she says. *“For where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God.”*

It’s one of the most beautiful confessions in Scripture. Ruth doesn’t just pledge loyalty to Naomi. She confesses faith in Naomi’s God. *“Your God shall be my God.”* Ruth is leaving everything behind – her homeland, her culture, her family, her security, her gods – to follow the Lord.

Ruth’s faith is truly miraculous. Because she had absolutely no earthly reason to believe. She was a Moabite, not an Israelite. And she was standing before a woman whose faith in the Lord was, by all appearances, stone cold. And yet, she had heard of the Lord’s faithfulness to his people. And that Word of promise was enough. The Holy Spirit gave her a heart that trusted that promise, even when she couldn’t see it.

Faith isn’t blind optimism or sentimental loyalty. Faith is clinging to the Lord’s promises, even when His ways are hidden. That’s why the verb used for Ruth – “she clung to her” – is the same word used in Genesis 2 for a husband clinging to his wife. It’s covenant language. Ruth is not just holding Naomi’s hand. She’s holding onto the Lord’s mercy.

We see in Ruth the same faith that called Abraham out of Ur. The same faith that led Peter to say, *“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”* It’s the faith that says, *“Even when I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.”* This is what the Lord works in His people. A faith that refuses to turn back.

Ruth's confession becomes the turning point of the whole book. Everything that follows flows from this confession of faith.

The thing is, though, that Ruth's life doesn't immediately get easier because of it. When she arrives in Bethlehem, she's a foreigner and the poorest of the poor. She spends her days gleaning scraps in the fields. But the Lord sees her. The Lord has plans for her.

He provides Boaz to her and Naomi as a kinsman-redeemer. A kinsman-redeemer was a member of a clan who would take responsibility for a widow in poverty. Someone to provide for her and protect her. And in Ruth's case, Boaz would do even more than that: he would eventually marry her. But Ruth doesn't know that yet. She simply walks by faith, not by sight.

Ruth didn't know she would that Boaz would marry her. She didn't know that she would become the great-grandmother of King David. She didn't know she would stand in the family line of Jesus. She didn't know that through her would come the Messiah and Savior of the world. She simply trusted that the Lord who had shown mercy to Israel would also show mercy to her.

That's what the Holy Spirit does in every believer's heart. He teaches us to say, *"Where you go, I will go."* He teaches us to follow the Lord Jesus even when the road leads to the cross.

Jesus Himself once said, *"If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me."* Ruth's road led from Moab to Bethlehem, from famine to harvest, from emptiness to fullness. Our road leads through suffering to glory, through the cross to resurrection. Faith doesn't mean that we understand God's plan. It means we trust the God whose plan ends in redemption.

After Ruth marries Boaz and gives birth to a son, the women of Bethlehem say to Naomi, *"Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a redeemer!"* Naomi, once bitter, now holds a child in her arms. The same Naomi who once said, *"The Lord's hand is against me,"* now rejoices that His hand has been her salvation.

Ruth's redeemer points us to our Redeemer: Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of God. Like Boaz, he paid the price to redeem us, not with silver or gold, but with His holy, precious blood and his innocent suffering and death. Like Boaz, he took those crushed by sin and death, those outside his kingdom, and made them part of His family. Like Boaz, he says to you, *"You are Mine."*

And when we confess our faith like Ruth and say to Christ, *"Where you go, I will go,"* we are actually echoing what Christ has already said to us. For before we ever followed Him, He followed us. He left His Father's throne, took on our flesh, bore our death, and said like Ruth, *"Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried."* He followed us into the grave, that we might follow Him out of it.

Naomi's story began in famine and ended in fullness. Ruth's story began in pagan darkness and ended in covenant grace. Both are pictures of our story in Christ. The same Lord who turned Naomi's bitterness into joy, who called Ruth from idolatry to faith, who brought redemption out of famine and death, that same Lord is at work in your life.

So when you feel like Naomi – empty, bitter, forgotten – the Lord's promise still stands. He has not turned His hand against you. For His hand bears the nail marks of love for you.

When you feel like Ruth – wandering, uncertain, small – the Lord's covenant faithfulness still holds you. He has made you His own in baptism. He has joined you to His people. He has given you a Redeemer.

*"Where you go, I will go."* Those words are more than a vow of friendship. They are the language of faith. Ruth spoke them to Naomi. The Church speaks them to Christ. *"Where You go, Lord, we will go. Where You lodge, we will lodge. Your people are our people. Your God is our God."*

For the Lord who called Ruth out of Moab has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. The Lord who gave Naomi a Redeemer has given you His Son. The Lord who turned famine into feast now feeds you with the Bread of Life.

So follow Him. Trust Him. Confess Him. Where He goes, you will go. And where He reigns, you will reign with Him forever. Amen.