



Thankoffering Service

1/31/2021

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As we celebrate Thankoffering Sunday this morning, we share in a tradition that goes back to the 1800s or even earlier, joining our offerings with theirs to support ministry of many kinds.

We also set aside this day to celebrate not only the Women of the ELCA, but the Women of Nativity, whose tireless efforts within our church help so many others, both outside of the church as well as inside the church, among our members and their families.

This celebration and its focus on women brings to mind the story of Ruth and her acts of love, her relationship with Naomi and their faith that God would provide for them.

The book of Ruth begins in Chapter 1 with the story of how Elimelech and his wife Naomi relocated to the land of Moab to escape the famine in Bethlehem. Elimelech was a good provider, maintaining property in both Moab and Bethlehem, and a faithful follower of God.

After he passed, Naomi was left with their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. The sons each married a Moabite woman, Ruth and Orpah. A few years later, these sons also passed away, leaving their wives childless. Naomi becomes very bitter with the loss of her husband and sons, but Ruth stayed with her, consoling and taking care of her. Naomi heard from the grapevine that the famine has passed in her homeland, Bethlehem, so Naomi decides to head back to home where she still has friends and neighbors. At first both of her daughters-in-law said that they would stay with her, but Naomi convinces Orpah to go back to her family. Ruth refuses to change her mind, declaring in verse 16 that, "Where you go, I will go" and the two of them travel onward to Bethlehem.

Verse 19 announces their arrival in Bethlehem. Naomi is recognized by her neighbors and remaining family members and she and Ruth quickly settled in. Even though Ruth was a Moabite, she was welcomed there because her reputation as a faithful daughter-in-law had preceded her.

They needed to find a way to survive, so in Chapter 2, Naomi asked Ruth to go into the fields and help with the barley harvest that was in progress. There she is spotted by Boaz and in Verse 8, he agrees to protect her while she was working in his fields, stating in verse 11 and 12, that "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. May the Lord reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!"

At the end of the day, she went home to Naomi and told her about meeting Boaz. In Chapter 3, Naomi describes how she should seduce Boaz, but Ruth decides to propose to him instead of tricking him into marrying her. He appreciated her honesty and her loyalty to Naomi. After some minor haggling with a relative of Elimelech in Chapter 4 over the ownership of the property that, in this day and age, would have belonged to Naomi outright, Boaz claimed Ruth and the land from her former father-in-law's estate. They got married and brought Naomi into their home. Ruth bore a son, naming him Obed. Obed began the line of descendancy that begat Jesse, who begat the "Golden King", David, the ancestor of Jesus.

I turned to the internet to get some other insights to this book. Wikipedia offered up the opinion that Ruth herself was unusual in her loyalty to Naomi as Moabites were noted for their **lack** of kindness (Deuteronomy 23:5). Her willingness to pursue Boaz, an older, settled bachelor spoke to her maturity as her head wasn't turned by younger men. In Boaz' opinion, these characteristics set her apart from other women and made her attractive to him.

This is a story about trust and caretaking. Ruth trusts Naomi to lead her to a new and safe life and then find her a husband. Naomi trusts Ruth that she will take care of her, provide for her and give her companionship in her old age. Ruth was willing to do hard labor in order to feed the two of them. Naomi was willing to take advantage of her husband's connections to find Ruth a job and, in the end, a husband and children.

I also found the following article "Ruth - The Woman Who Rose from Obscurity to Riches" on the "Bible Gateway" website. The author begins the article stating that in 1988, "Ruth is seventh in the list of the first hundred names in America, with an estimated number of almost one and a half million bearing the name. My mom, her aunt, one of my cousins-in-law, and myself are included in that number. The name is translated as "...the act of seeing', 'sight', 'something worth seeing' - or the word for 'friendship' or a 'female friend'..."her character revealed her to be a woman capable of rare friendship'."

It is unclear if this name evolved from this woman's attributes or if anyone who is named Ruth will follow in her footsteps. I would love to think that I could live up to her legacy...

Another article I found was titled, "5 Lessons Women can learn from Ruth" by Brittany Rust, taken from the Crosswalk.com website. In this article the author highlighted five lessons that we should carry in our hearts.

They are:

1. Don't let the past hold you back,
2. Be full of faith,
3. Value great character,
4. Believe redemption is possible and
5. Leave a legacy.

Actually, I think that I could write another sermon on this list alone!

May we all be as faithful as Ruth!