

WORSHIP FOR SUNDAY, OCTOBER 31, 2021

Pacific Presbyterian Church and First Presbyterian Church of Union, Missouri

THIRTY-FIRST SUNDAY in ORDINARY TIME

GATHERING

PRELUDE

CALL TO WORSHIP

One: Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord, O my soul!

**All: I will praise the Lord as long as I live;
I will sing praises to my God all my life long.**

One: Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob,
who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them;

**All: who executes justice for the oppressed and
gives food to the hungry.**

One: The Lord sets prisoners free and lifts up those
who are bowed down.

**All: The Lord watches over the stranger and
upholds the orphan and the widow.
The Lord will reign forever. Praise the Lord!**

***OPENING HYMN** “Blest Be the Tie That Binds” GtG 306 (*Verses 1-3 & 5*)

One: Blest be the tie that binds
our hearts in Christian love.

**All: The fellowship of kindred minds
is like to that above.**

One: Before our Maker’s throne

All: we pour our ardent prayers.

One: Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one,

All: our comforts and our cares.

One: We share our mutual woes;
our mutual burdens bear.

**All: And often for each other flows
the sympathizing tear.**

One: From sorrow, toil, and pain,
and sin we shall be free;
**All: and perfect love and friendship reign
through all eternity.**

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***UNISON PRAYER OF CONFESSION**

Relying on the ultimate love we acknowledge this day, we turn to you, O God, to confess our sin. Instead of sharing your love with others, we hoard it for ourselves and those like us. Even then, too often we fail those we profess to love the most. And though you call us to trust you to see us through the dark and stormy days, we do not. Forgive us, O God. Have mercy upon us and gently remake us. Tenderly remind us of your trustworthiness. Nudge us each day to open ourselves up to the wonders you can do through us. And grace us by your love that we might share your love with all your children. For it is in Christ's name we pray. Amen.

***SILENT CONFESSION**

***ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

One: In the strength of the Lord Almighty we confide.
All: In the mercy of God we trust.
One: By the power of God we are restored.
All: By the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ we are renewed.
One: So rejoice and celebrate this day!
All: For in Jesus Christ we are forgiven, we are loved, we are given new life. Alleluia! Amen!

***THE PEACE**

One: The peace of Christ be with you.
All: And also with you.
(From your seat, a brief sign of peace may be shared: a wave of the hand, a nod of the head, etc.)

THE WORD

SCRIPTURE READING Ruth (selections)

RUTH (Today's English Version/Good News Translation+)

^{1:1-2} Long ago, in the days before Israel had a king, there was a famine in the land. So a man named Elimelech, who belonged to the clan of Ephrath and who lived in Bethlehem in Judah, went with his wife Naomi and their two sons to live for a while in the country of Moab. [The people of Moab worshiped idols and were usually enemies of the people

of Israel.] While they were living there, ³ Elimelech died, and Naomi was left alone with her two sons, ⁴ who married Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth. About ten years later ⁵ her two sons also died, and Naomi was left all alone, without husband or sons.

⁶ Some time later Naomi heard that the Lord had blessed the Lord's people by giving them good crops; so she got ready to leave Moab with her daughters-in-law. ⁷ They started out together to go back to Judah, but on the way ⁸ she said to them, "Go back home and stay with your mothers. May the Lord be as good to you as you have been to me and to those who have died. ⁹ And may the Lord make it possible for each of you to marry again and have a home."

So Naomi kissed them good-bye. But they started crying ¹⁰ and said to her, "No! We will go with you to your people."

¹¹ "You must go back, my daughters," Naomi answered. "Why do you want to come with me? Do you think I could have sons again for you to marry? ¹² Go back home, for I am too old to get married again. Even if I thought there was still hope, and so got married tonight and had sons, ¹³ would you wait until they had grown up? Would this keep you from marrying someone else? No, my daughters, you know that's impossible. The Lord has turned against me, and I feel very bitter about what has happened to you."

¹⁴ Again they started crying. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye and went back home, but Ruth held on to her. ¹⁵ So Naomi said to her, "Ruth, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. Go back home with her."

¹⁶ But Ruth answered, "Don't ask me to leave you! Let me go with you. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. ¹⁷ Wherever you die, I will die, and that is where I will be buried. May the Lord's worst punishment come upon me if I let anything but death separate me from you!"

¹⁸ When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she said nothing more.

¹⁹ When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town became excited, and the women there exclaimed, "Is this really Naomi?"

²⁰ She answered, "Don't call me Naomi[which means 'pleasant']; call me Marah,[which means 'bitter'] because Almighty God has made my life bitter. ²¹ When I left here, I had plenty, but the Lord has brought me back without a thing. Why call me Naomi when the Lord Almighty has condemned me and sent me trouble?"

²² This, then, was how Naomi came back from Moab with Ruth, her Moabite daughter-in-law. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the barley harvest was just beginning.

^{2:1-3} One day, Ruth said to Naomi, "Let me see if I can find someone who will let me pick up the grain left in the fields by the harvest workers."

Naomi answered, "Go ahead, my daughter." So right away, Ruth went out to pick up grain in a field owned by Boaz. He was a relative of Naomi's husband Elimelech, as well as a rich and important man.

⁴ Some time later Boaz himself arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the workers.

⁵ Boaz asked the man in charge, "Who is that young woman?"

⁶ The man answered, “She is the foreigner who came back from Moab with Naomi. ⁷ She asked me to let her follow the workers and gather grain. She has been working since early morning and has just now stopped to rest for a while under the shelter.”

⁸ Boaz went over to Ruth and said, “I think it would be best for you not to pick up grain in anyone else’s field. Work with the women here; ⁹ watch them to see where they are reaping and stay with them. I have ordered my men not to molest you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and drink from the water jars that they have filled.”

¹⁰ Ruth bowed down with her face touching the ground, and said to Boaz, “Why should you be so concerned about me? Why should you be so kind to a foreigner?”

¹¹ Boaz answered, “I have heard about everything that you have done for your mother-in-law since your husband died. I know how you left your father and mother and your own country and how you came to live among a people you had never known before. ¹² May the Lord reward you for what you have done. May you have a full reward from the Lord God of Israel, to whom you have come for protection!”

¹⁵⁻¹⁶ After she had left to go and gather grain, Boaz ordered the workers, “Let her gather grain even where the bundles are lying, and don't say anything to stop her. Besides that, pull out some heads of grain from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up.”

¹⁷ So Ruth gathered grain in the field until evening, and she found she had nearly twenty-five pounds. ¹⁸ She took the grain back into town and showed her mother-in-law how much she had gathered. ¹⁹ Naomi asked her, “Where did you gather all this grain today? Whose field have you been working in?”

So Ruth told Naomi that she had been working in a field belonging to a man named Boaz.

²⁰ “May the Lord bless Boaz!” Naomi exclaimed. “The Lord always keeps the Lord’s promises to the living and the dead.” And she went on, “That man is a close relative of ours, one of those responsible for taking care of us.”

²³ So Ruth worked with the women in Boaz’ field and gathered grain until all the barley and wheat had been harvested. And she continued to live with her mother-in-law.

^{3:1} Some time later Naomi said to Ruth, “I must find a husband for you, so that you will have a home of your own. ² Remember that this man Boaz, whose women you have been working with, is our relative. Now listen. This evening he will be threshing the barley. ³ So wash yourself, put on some perfume, and get dressed in your best clothes. Then go where he is threshing, but don't let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. ⁴ Be sure to notice where he lies down, and after he falls asleep, go and lift the covers and lie down at his feet. He will tell you what to do.”

⁵ Ruth answered, “I will do everything you say.”

⁸ In the middle of the night, Boaz suddenly woke up and was shocked to see a woman lying at his feet. ⁹ “Who are you?” he asked.

“It's Ruth, sir,” she answered. “Because you are a close relative, you are responsible for taking care of me. So please marry me.”

¹⁰ Boaz replied, "The Lord bless you! This shows how truly loyal you are to your family. You could have looked for a younger man, either rich or poor, but you didn't. ¹¹ Now don't worry, Ruth. I will do everything you ask. You are respected by everyone in town. ¹² It is true that I am a close relative and am responsible for you, but there is a man who is a closer relative than I am. ¹³ In the morning we will find out whether or not he will take responsibility for you. If so, well and good; if not, then I swear by the living Lord that I will take the responsibility. Now lie down and stay here till morning."

¹⁴⁻¹⁵ In the morning, before the others had woken up, Boaz sent Ruth home with almost fifty pounds of barley. ¹⁶ When she arrived home, her mother-in-law asked her, "How did you get along, daughter?"

Ruth told her everything that Boaz had done for her. ¹⁷ She added, "He told me I must not come back to you empty-handed, so he gave me all this barley."

¹⁸ Naomi said to her, "Now be patient, Ruth, until you see how this all turns out. Boaz will not rest today until he settles the matter."

^{4:1-12} Then Boaz, together with ten of the leaders of the town, met with Elimelech's closest relative, and asked if he wanted to look after Naomi and Ruth. It would mean buying back land that had once belonged to Elimelech and marrying Ruth. But the man said, 'No'.

¹³ So Boaz bought the land and took Ruth home as his wife. The Lord blessed her, and she became pregnant and had a son. ¹⁴ The women said to Naomi, "Praise the Lord! who has given you a grandson today to take care of you. May the boy become famous in Israel! ¹⁵ Your daughter-in-law loves you, and has done more for you than seven sons. And now she has given you a grandson, who will bring new life to you and give you security in your old age." ¹⁶ Naomi took the child, held him close, and took care of him.

¹⁷ The women of the neighborhood named the boy Obed. They told everyone, "A son has been born to Naomi!"

Obed became the father of Jesse, who was the father of David.

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON "A Ruth by Any Other Name..." by Pastor Bill Vincent

Someone has commented on the story of Ruth and said this: it is a tale

"so delicate in its transparent simplicity that the worst service one can do the story is to comment on it." (Richard Moulton; Interpreter's Dictionary, vol.4, article by Dorothea Ward Harvey)

Oh, boy. I'm in trouble.

Because, yes, I'm going to comment on it, this wonderful story about Ruth, but also about Boaz and Naomi.

And invite us to ponder about their stories, and what their stories might have to say to us and our stories.

There is Ruth.

But Ruth answered, "Don't ask me to leave you! Let me go with you. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. Wherever you die, I will die, and that is where I will be buried...." (1:16-17)

"Wherever you go, I will go ... your God will be my God."

Now wait a minute: how can this be? Almost sounds like faith can be turned on and off with the flick of a switch. Or, like choosing which cereal to have for breakfast. "Today I'll be a Christian. Tomorrow I'll believe in Buddha. And next month I'll be an agnostic."

There are cultural and historical items that need to be considered, because for them, (as one person noted)

God, land, and people were one. (Interpreter's Bible, vol.2, exegesis by Louise Pettibone Smith)

But even beyond that. To talk about it in those terms is to suggest the deeper point that Ruth, as she says this to Naomi, serves as is an example of a deep commitment and faithfulness in relationships: a sense of loyalty, a bond, a connection; a willingness to risk that connection with another, a willingness to risk a relationship with another; a willingness to link one's own fate and situation with that of another.

I remember hearing of someone saying to friend:

"As long as I have a roof over my head, you have a roof over your head. As long as I have food on the table, you have food on the table. As long as I have clothes on my back, you have clothes on your back. As long as I have money in the bank, you have money in the bank."

That's a strong bond with another. That is linking, and risking, one's own fate and life situation with another. That's commitment.

We may think of wedding vows:

"in plenty and in want, in joy and in sorrow, in sickness and in health, as long as we both shall live"

Now, this is not to suggest I connect myself with another and allow them to drag me down to the depths of despair and even death.

But it is an acknowledgment of the importance of that bond of community. Think of some of those stories we read in Acts of the early church, where everyone had all things in common, and as any had need, that need was met by what they all had in common. (See Acts 2:44-45 & 4:32-35)

"Blest Be *that* Tie that Binds" us, one to another.

Something of what Ruth teaches us.

Then there is Boaz.

Ruth bowed down with her face touching the ground, and said to Boaz, "Why should you be so concerned about me? Why should you be so kind to a foreigner?" (2:10)

Reminds us of the importance of being open and receptive to others, even, and maybe especially, to those different from us: the ones we call strangers, foreigners.

Throughout this story, it is emphasized time and time again that Ruth is a Moabite, a foreigner, a stranger, not part of the people of Israel. Boaz had no obligation to her. Yet he extended to her the same kindness as to other workers, those of his own clan and tribe and nation. He even went "beyond the call of duty."

God calls us to be open to others, because God is open to others and God is open to using others and being in the midst of others and being sought after and found by others.

How open are we to welcoming others, the stranger in our midst?

The vast majority of us in this country have "foreign blood" in our veins, with the history of immigrants to this land, this nation, this country.

Here she is, Ruth – an immigrant, a Moabite, a foreigner – who ends up being the great-grandmother of David, the greatest king over Israel.

James Cleland notes:

there is an eternal hardiness in [this story's] conviction of a God whose love overflows the limits good people seek to impose upon [God], [a God] who continually stretches the content of neighborhood and [neighbor] until it embraces all lands and peoples. (Interpreter's Bible, vol.2, exposition)

Something of what Boaz teaches us.

And then there is Naomi.

Naomi herself bemoans her condition at the beginning of the story:

"Don't call me Naomi ['pleasant'], call me Marah ['bitter'], because Almighty God has made my life bitter. ... Why call me Naomi when the Lord Almighty has condemned me and sent me trouble?" (1:20-21)

Yet she also is the one to acknowledge God's guidance in the midst of what happens:

"May the Lord bless Boaz! The Lord always keeps the Lord's promises to the living and the dead." (2:20)

Naomi reminds us of the quiet, too-often-unnoticed providence of God.

God's hand was at work in what was going on, even though such action might only have been acknowledged, and recognized, after the fact.

Now, this is not to say that every situation will turn out "happily ever after" as we might think of it. But it does affirm that, even though we may not see it, God is at work in our midst.

Think of Joseph: betrayed by his brothers, sold into slavery, unjustly accused and imprisoned; yet ends up second most powerful person in all Egypt next to the Pharaoh. Near the end of that story, Joseph confesses to his brothers,

"You plotted evil against me, but God turned it into good, in order to preserve the lives of many people who are alive today because of what happened." (Genesis 50:20-TEV)

And let us not forget the cross: the ultimate example of God working, even when we don't see it, or understand it in the moment.

"A story of divine providence," writes Herbert G. May,
a tale of what happens when one seeks refuge in the shadow of the wings of the Lord. (Interpreter's One-Volume Commentary)

Something of what Naomi teaches us.

Ruth: modeling commitment and faithfulness in relationships.
Boaz: welcoming the stranger, the other; welcoming all.
Naomi: trusting in God's quiet, often unseen, providing and guiding.
Their stories.
Our stories – yours and mine.

***AFFIRMATION OF FAITH**

**We trust in God,
whom Jesus called Abba, Father.
In sovereign love God created the world good
and makes everyone equally in God's image,
male and female, of every race and people,
to live as one community.
But we rebel against God; we hide from our Creator.
Ignoring God's commandments,
we violate the image of God in others and ourselves,
accept lies as truth,
exploit neighbor and nature,
and threaten death to the planet entrusted to our care.
We deserve God's condemnation.
Yet God acts with justice and mercy to redeem creation.
In everlasting love,
the God of Abraham and Sarah chose a covenant people
to bless all families of the earth.
Hearing their cry,
God delivered the children of Israel
from the house of bondage.
Loving us still,
God makes us heirs with Christ of the covenant.
Like a mother who will not forsake her nursing child,
like a father who runs to welcome the prodigal home,
God is faithful still.**

(from A Brief Statement of Faith, Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) Book of Confessions)

PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE

Pastor: Hear our prayer...
People: ...God of sustenance and grace.

THE LORD'S PRAYER *(Traditional)*

**Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done,
on earth as it is in heaven.**

**Give us this day our daily bread;
and forgive us our debts,
 as we forgive our debtors;
and lead us not into temptation,
 but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
 and the power, and the glory,
 forever. Amen.**

OFFERING

Invitation

Reflection

**Unison Prayer of Dedication*

You provide for us all our days, O Lord, and we give you thanks. We thank you for relationships of love that nurture and support us. We thank you for your guidance through the questions and confusions of life. Make us ever-mindful of the many ways you bless us, and make us always grateful. Accept our offerings as reminders of our commitment to you this day and always. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

SENDING

***CLOSING HYMN** “If Thou but Trust in God to Guide Thee” GtG 816

- 1. If thou but trust in God to guide thee,
with hopeful heart through all thy ways,
God will give strength, whate'er betide thee,
to bear thee through the evil days.
Who trusts in God's unchanging love
builds on the rock that nought can move.**
- 2. Only be still, and wait God's leisure
in cheerful hope, with heart content
to take whate'er thy Keeper's pleasure
and all-discerning love hath sent.
No doubt our inmost wants are clear
to One who holds us always dear.**
- 3. Sing, pray, and swerve not from God's ways,
but do thine own part faithfully.**

**Trust the rich promises of grace;
so shall they be fulfilled in thee.
God never yet forsook at need
the soul secured by trust indeed.**

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***CHARGE AND BLESSING**

Pastor: ...And let the gathered people of God say...

People: ...Amen.

POSTLUDE

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