

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, Wash.
March 7, 2010**

The book of Ruth

Lenten Lessons from RUTH!

1. *We have a “kinsman-redeemer”*
2. *We have a universal Savior*

**Hymns: “Remember Your Love” – 714 –
Distribution: 102,100 – 114 (6-7)**

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

Readings:

1. *Ruth 1:1-2a,3-11,14-18*
2. *Ruth 3:1-13*
3. *Ruth 4:1-10,13-14*

Do you know any “Ruths?” We had a Ruth in our extended family, my wife’s great aunt Ruth, who went to heaven a few years ago. The name Ruth fit her well. Ruth is a strong name! It means “friend.”

Sadly, Ruth doesn’t seem to be a popular name anymore. I checked out the name Ruth with records from Social Security Administration to see how many people have named babies Ruth lately. I was disappointed. It wasn’t in the top 5 in 2008. Or in the top 10. Or the top 50 or 100. In 2008 the name Ruth was #362 on the list of names chosen for babies in our country. Only 899 people in the United States picked it for their daughters.

There were some names that finished ahead of Ruth on the list that were surprising to me. More babies were named these names than Ruth:

- Esmeralda
- Fatima
- Guadalupe

- Daisy

Even some odder biblical names beat out Ruth:

- Trinity
- Heaven
- Genesis
- Delilah (!)

How many “Ruths” do we have in our congregation of about 530 members? Two.

I have nothing against the names I mentioned before, but I wish Ruth were a little more popular, because of the fine lessons we have from the woman Ruth in the Bible today. **Let’s learn two meaningful lessons from Ruth today!**

1 – To learn these lessons today, we need to understand the story that we read in our Scripture readings from the book of Ruth. The beginning of the book tells us that an Israelite man named Elimelech was married to a woman named Naomi. They lived in Bethlehem and were blessed with two sons, Mahlon and Kilion. A great famine fell upon the land of Israel, so they decided to move the family to the neighboring country of Moab, where there evidently was more food. This may have occurred when the Lord brought famines on the country because of the corrupt kings that came to power in the OT.

The news of their migration surprises us. They were leaving the Promised Land that the Lord had given to his people. Also, the country of Moab historically was not friendly to the Israelites. But regardless, they moved there. Then the book tells us that Elimelech died, and the two sons married Moabite women. After this, the two sons died, a tragic turn of events. The three women were left, and there were not a lot of prospects for basic survival for them, since they were widowed.

Naomi decided to return home to the family property at Bethlehem. She encouraged the two daughters-in-law to stay in their homeland and remarry, but Ruth was insistent on going with Naomi. The two of them returned to the Promised

Land destitute. They had no husbands, and Naomi would most likely have to sell the family property.

But then the story begins to take a happier turn! After they returned home, Ruth began to find food for them by gleaning. Gleaning meant she would walk behind harvesters in the field and pick up stray stalks that were dropped by the workers. It was a legitimate “welfare program” in the country. When Naomi asked her where she was gleaning, Ruth told her it was at a man named Boaz’ fields. Naomi was very happy. Boaz was a relative of the family’s who was a “kinsman-redeemer” of theirs!

What was a “**kinsman-redeemer**”? The kinsman-redeemer was an important person in the OT.

- “Kinsman” means that the person was a relative.
- “Redeemer” means to buy something back.

A kinsman-redeemer had two responsibilities as listed in Leviticus 25:

- 1) If a near relative had to sell the family property because of bankruptcy, the kinsman-redeemer was supposed to buy it and keep it in the family.
- 2) If a near relative had to sell himself and his family into slavery because of bankruptcy, the kinsman-redeemer was supposed to pay for them to set them free.

This was a big responsibility! Today, we might say that if your brother or cousin ran into financial trouble and was going to have to sell his house, you would jump in and say, “No, No! Don’t lose the family home! I’ll buy it from you to keep it in the family and to help you out!” If a relative would have tremendous debt threatening their family, you would step in to help with their financial situation.

Basically, the kinsman-redeemer needed to have four qualifications:

- 1) He had to be related to the people involved

- 2) He had to be a free man
- 3) He had to be willing to make these purchases
- 4) He had to be financially able to do this

Also, as background to what happens with Ruth’s situation, a different OT law stated that if a married man died childless, his brother was supposed to father an heir through the widow so his name would not be terminated.

With that in mind, we now come to Ruth’s appearance at night to Boaz. As we read in the reading, she came to the threshing area where he was sleeping, uncovered his feet and lay there. When he awoke, she requested that he spread his garment over her. This was a request to fulfill the duty of a kinsman-redeemer! This was a proper request on her part.

Boaz said that he would do this, but that there was one relative who is closer to Naomi and Ruth who had first shot at redeeming them. The next day he asked the other relative in front of the town’s elders if he wanted to redeem the property of Naomi. The man said yes. Then Boaz told him that there was a widow in the picture. Was he willing to take that responsibility on? The man said no. So the man gave Boaz his sandal. That may seem like a strange thing to do, but this might be considered a “signature” on a contract in that day. People could witness that the passing of the sandal had taken place to officially make an agreement. After the man declined to be the kinsman-redeemer, Boaz bought the property, married Ruth, and fathered a son through her. Their future was very bright now!

This story is more than “great history” to us. We didn’t just come here today to simply see great history, but to learn from Ruth. What does this all mean for us today? Listen to what Ephesians 2 tells us: “*Remember that (formerly) you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world.*” This talks about our problem by nature. Because of our sins, we were bankrupt. Because of our natural condition as sinners, we were destitute. We were without hope, and we were undesirable!

Can you imagine being stranded in a foreign country with no money, no friends, and about to lose your place to stay? That's a scary thought! Yet it doesn't even compare to how destitute and lost we were in our sinful condition. We are spiritual beggars. We are lost and doomed to eternal death in hell.

However, Ruth's story shows how we can rejoice! We have a kinsman-redeemer who totally fixed our problem. Scripture tells us:

- *"In Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ." (Ephesians 2)*
- *"We have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins." (Ephesians 1:7)*
- *"(Jesus Christ) gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good." (Titus 2:14)*

Are you getting the picture? Jesus served as our Kinsman-Redeemer! He was:

- 1) Our brother because he chose to become human like us
- 2) A "free man," not a slave to a sinful condition as we are
- 3) Willing to bear the price of our sins on the cross
- 4) Able to pay for them because he is the Son of God

How fortunate we are! **We are not left destitute, bankrupt, and hopeless, but we have a place in God's family and in heaven because of what we commemorate this Lent: the suffering and death of Jesus, our "kinsman-redeemer!"**

2 — The book of Ruth gives us one other lesson today. We see this lesson in the fact of who Ruth was. Who was she? A foreigner. An alien. She was not from the family of Israel. She was not a daughter of Abraham. She was from Moab.

As we mentioned before, Moab was hostile many times to the nation of Israel. They attacked the nation of Israel at times, and even made Israel pay taxes to them when they had the upper hand. Moab was also an enemy spiritually of Israel's God. They worshiped the god called Chemosh. The Bible has two adjectives for Chemosh. Detestable and vile. We have an account in the OT of a human sacrifice that was made to please this god!

The nation of Moab was an enemy of God's people, but what do we see about the promise of salvation that God extends through the Messiah Jesus? **Redemption and salvation are for all people, Moabites included!** When Ruth told Naomi, *"Your God will be my God,"* she put herself under the umbrella of the promises of the true God.

The Bible makes it clear that it makes no difference what nationality you are. Listen to these NT verses:

- *"Righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe... All are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus." (Romans 3:22,24)*
- A picture in Revelation of heaven - *"I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.'" (Revelation 7:9,10)*

We have every reason to believe that Ruth is among those standing before Jesus' throne in heaven now! We are very thankful for this account in the OT, because it gives us an example of salvation being for all nations! Sometimes the OT, with its purpose of showing the history leading up to the coming of Jesus, we don't have a lot of examples of people of other races coming to faith and being saved. **However, in the book of**

Ruth, we have a clear example of this. We have a universal Savior!

What a comforting lesson we see here, for God does not discriminate against people when it comes to salvation. I recently saw a special program on the life of Bill Russell. Some of you may remember that Bill Russell was the center on the Boston Celtics' many championship basketball teams in the 1960's. One part of the show talked about how Bill Russell was awarded the key to the city of Boston, and then went out to a restaurant with two other African-American players from the team, and they were told at an empty restaurant that there was no room for them to be served. Discrimination! The message was clear (and sickening): Win basketball championships for us and we'll applaud you and give you the key to the city, but forget trying to have more of a relationship than that with us.

Discrimination angers us. It's not right, and it's not fair. Thank the Lord he has not shown discrimination to us. Romans 2 clearly says, "*God does not show favoritism.*" This comforts us because we are not Jews (At least I don't know of any direct children of Abraham in our church). If God showed favoritism in salvation toward the Jewish nation, then we would be in trouble! **Rejoice every day that God has saved you no matter what race you are!**

Another encouragement this lesson gives us is to tell this to others in the world who need to hear that the Lord has saved them in Jesus Christ. Do you know what our church Mission Statement is? It's: "*Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.*" What are you doing to help us fulfill our Mission Statement? Are you inviting others to come hear the message they need to know before they leave this world, namely, that Jesus Christ is their Savior from sin? Or do you have no part in your church's Mission Statement?

May God forgive us for the times we have kept this news to ourselves or not invited someone to come hear it at God's house. **May he give us a zeal for inviting the lost, as we strive to reach**

the world with the news of the universal Savior Jesus!

Ruth! What an enjoyable book of four chapters this is! Now that we've gotten a brief glimpse of it, I'd encourage you to read the book this week. **And may we remember these important lessons from Ruth:**

- 1. We have a kinsman-redeemer who has saved us**
- 2. And we have a universal Savior who died for all people!**

God bless us as we take this message to the world! Amen.