



***BIBLE STUDY for the TWENTY FOURTH SUNDAY
after PENTECOST***



Focus text: Ruth 1: 1 - 18

Additional texts: Psalm 146; Hebrews 9: 11 - 14; Mark 12: 28 - 34

The book of Ruth is only four chapters long—approximately 80 verses— and it is packed with important avenues to explore, from socio-cultural and justice-oriented issues like women’s rights and the rights and treatment of foreigners to theological considerations, such as, how God is perceived and how God provides for God’s people.

The book may be called Ruth, and she is undoubtedly an important figure in the narrative, but the story is Naomi’s. Her story is one marred by fear, displacement, struggle, and grief. To read the book of Ruth as Naomi’s story means we have to linger in her grief, to accept her anger and frustration, and to tarry with her and Ruth—silent, resigned, burdened—on the road to Bethlehem.

We read a story of grace that holds space for grief and doubt without condemnation, that doesn’t try to “fix” it. When we see grief and anger—particularly when that anger is directed towards God—we use the “you’ll be fine” and the “things will get better soon” dismissals. We try to extinguish the fiery rage of anger that grief brings—eager to put out the flames of the “unfairness” of it all.

But Naomi’s story doesn’t stifle the flame; it accepts the grief, the anger, the complaint. It holds those feelings as it moves forward and her perspective never changes. Even after Ruth’s commitment, Naomi’s silence on the road (verse 18) and complaint to the women in Bethlehem (verses 20 and 21) indicate that she still carries her grief and frustration.

Her silence at the end of the narrative is most telling. We frequently encounter stories of struggle, loss, and redemption in the Bible. Those stories often end with the main characters repenting for their doubts, giving thanks, and praising God. At the end of this story, however, Naomi remains silent. Naomi’s story is one that meets people where they are—in between grief and joy.

There is much uncertainty, grief, and frustration in our world today— divisions that arise because of xenophobia and racism, political traumas and deep-rooted conflicts, the fears and frustrations with regard to climate change and the grief of loss due to hurricanes, earthquakes, and other natural disasters.

The blessings at the end of the narrative do not overshadow or eliminate the grief experienced earlier. The good news of the book of Ruth, is that blessings can still come even when we are in the midst of grief, in the throes of anger and frustration. Naomi’s story also teaches us that if we’re not ready to acknowledge those blessings, that’s okay.

Those who are not ready to acknowledge blessing—those who are still struggling with the anger and angst of grief and struggle—can find solace in Naomi’s story.

Is Naomi's story your story? Have you had to endure too much grief in your life, whether in the distant or recent past?

Tarry with Naomi—silent, resigned, burdened. Acknowledge that blessings can still come, even when you are in the midst of grief, in the throes of anger and frustration and if you are not ready to accept those blessings, that's ok.

Find solace in Naomi's story.

Let us pray

Beloved Companion,

You deal with us kindly in steadfast love,

lifting up with care those bent low

and sustaining the weak and oppressed.

Release us from our anxious fears,

that we, holding fast to Your commandments,

may honour You with all that we are and all that we have.

Amen

