

Worship Outline for September 13, 2020
Risking Redemption: Ruth 1

COUNTDOWN

OPENING SEQUENCE

ONLINE GREETER: *Barb Collette*

OPENING VERSE: Romans 12:1-2 (CEB)

So, brothers and sisters, because of God's mercies, I encourage you to present your bodies as a living sacrifice that is holy and pleasing to God. This is your appropriate priestly service. Don't be conformed to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds so that you can figure out what God's will is—what is good and pleasing and mature.

PRELUDE

Hymn to Joy arr. Albert L. Travis
Diane Gronewold

OPENING PRAYER

God of Ruth and Naomi, of hope in bitterness, harvest in hunger, life in death, we offer our prayers of blessing on the feet and lives of all people. You, Lord, are born in our resistance to injustice and you invite us to take the risk of being redeemed. Invite us into solidarity as we worship you, and as you lead us to life and justice. Amen.

SONG FROM BRIAN

Through It All

CCLI #7060811 | Kameron Waters, Chris Franz, and Mariah McManus © 2014

God of the heavens, God of earth
God of the struggle, you're here with us
You're here with us

God of the cities, God of today
God of forever, bring us together
And we will sing

All our scars are made beautiful
Our broken hearts are made whole again
All we are is found in you
All our scars are made beautiful
Our broken hearts are made whole again
Alleluia, your love through it all

God of redemption, God of strength
We've got a freedom, we've got a reason
To sing

Creation's yearning
The world is turning around
The kingdom is coming now
Even the rocks cry out
You are worthy
And with a mighty sound
Of your people singing loud
Shout til the walls come down

BLESSING OF THE BACKPACKS

If you have not already, grab your backpack or briefcase so we can bless all those going back to school this fall. School will look different this year and that can be overwhelming and hard. So we want each one of you to have a small reminder that you are being prayed for by your pastors and the people of this faith community. When you come to drive thru communion starting at 10:30am, you can pick up a button to put on your backpack and briefcase.

Today, we give thanks for the blessing of backpacks for our children, youth, teachers and school staff. Over the next 9 months, these backpacks will carry supplies and papers, lunches and sneakers, accomplishments and challenges.

God bless these backpacks! And God bless the children, youth, and adults who carry them to school, at home learning spaces, and work. May our backpacks remind us that you are with us; and may we meet each new day with hope and purpose. Open our minds to the lessons each day holds; help us to make friends and to be good neighbors. Guide us in making choices that honor you. God bless these backpacks, these backpack carriers, and all people everywhere. Carry this blessing with you from the congregation:

We love you. We support you. We are praying for you!

OFFERING AND PRAYER OF DEDICATION (Good Sam, Building, General)

**Here in this place, there are no foreigners,
for all are welcome in God's house.**

**Here in this worship, there is only acceptance,
for love is the language of faith.**

**Here in our lives, there are no divisions,
for God dwells in each of us.**

Bless the gifts received this week, and may they be used to further your kingdom. amen.

SPECIAL MUSIC

Place in This World

Kirkpatrick, Grant & Smith

Michael Miller and Diane Gronewold

The wind is moving
But I am standing still
A life of pages
Waiting to be filled
A heart that's hopeful
A head that's full of dreams
But this becoming
Is harder than it seems

Feels like I'm
Looking for a reason
Roaming through the night to find
My place in this world
My place in this world
Not a lot to lean on
I need Your light to help me find

My place in this world
My place in this world

If there are millions
Down on their knees
Among the many
Can you still hear me?
Hear me asking
Where do I belong?
Is there a vision
That I can call my own?

Show me I'm
Looking for a reason
Roaming through the night to find
My place in this world
My place in this world
Not a lot to lean on
I need Your light to help me find
My place in this world
My place in this world

READING OF RUTH 1 (CEB)

Harris with text/images video

The family in Moab

1 During the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. A man with his wife and two sons went from Bethlehem of Judah to dwell in the territory of Moab. 2 The name of that man was Elimelech, the name of his wife was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They entered the territory of Moab and settled there.

3 But Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died. Then only she was left, along with her two sons. 4 They took wives for themselves, Moabite women; the name of the first was Orpah and the name of the second was Ruth. And they lived there for about ten years.

5 But both of the sons, Mahlon and Chilion, also died. Only the woman was left, without her two children and without her husband.

6 Then she arose along with her daughters-in-law to return from the field of Moab, because while in the territory of Moab she had heard that the Lord had paid attention to his people by providing food for them. 7 She left the place where she had been, and her two daughters-in-law went with her. They went along the road to return to the land of Judah.

8 Naomi said to her daughters-in-law, "Go, turn back, each of you to the household of your mother. May the Lord deal faithfully with you, just as you have done with the dead and with me.

9 May the Lord provide for you so that you may find security, each woman in the household of her husband." Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.

10 But they replied to her, "No, instead we will return with you, to your people."

11 Naomi replied, "Turn back, my daughters. Why would you go with me? Will there again be sons in my womb, that they would be husbands for you? 12 Turn back, my daughters. Go. I am

too old for a husband. If I were to say that I have hope, even if I had a husband tonight, and even more, if I were to bear sons— 13 would you wait until they grew up? Would you refrain from having a husband? No, my daughters. This is more bitter for me than for you, since the Lord's will has come out against me.”

14 Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth stayed with her. 15 Naomi said, “Look, your sister-in-law is returning to her people and to her gods. Turn back after your sister-in-law.”

16 But Ruth replied, “Don't urge me to abandon you, to turn back from following after you. Wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. 17 Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord do this to me and more so if even death separates me from you.” 18 When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped speaking to her about it.

19 So both of them went along until they arrived at Bethlehem. When they arrived at Bethlehem, the whole town was excited on account of them, and the women of the town asked, “Can this be Naomi?”

20 She replied to them, “Don't call me Naomi,[a] but call me Mara,[b] for the Almighty[c] has made me very bitter. 21 I went away full, but the Lord has returned me empty. Why would you call me Naomi, when the Lord has testified against me, and the Almighty has deemed me guilty?”

22 Thus Naomi returned. And Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, returned with her from the territory of Moab. They arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

SERMON

Rachael

Good morning!

Today we begin a new series together, as over the rest of this month we will read the book of Ruth together and explore its themes, which include loss and recovery, loyalty and patience, risk-taking and redemption. Reading a book of the Bible from beginning to end is worth doing. Many of us know key moments from this story, but the striking tale comes alive for us when we read it all, savor the Scripture, and get drawn into the tale of our ancestors in faith. Our preaching during this series is going to be focused primarily on the text and what it speaks to us. Your work throughout these weeks will be to prayerfully consider what these Scriptures offer today, in your life and in our shared community. As you experience wondering or connections you want to explore, I encourage you to share with each other in the comments or keep a notepad near you where you can jot down ideas and reflections. Remember that we won't all

see the same things or see things in the same way, and so for the sake of our relationships we'll want to interact with care, curiosity, and generosity of language and spirit.

Our story begins with a simple phrase: in the days when the judges ruled. We might be tempted to read this as once upon a time, but this is more than a literary opening to the story. These few words tell us that Elimelech and his family were living in Bethlehem during a time of sin and violence had taken hold of Israel. The later chapters in the book of Judges, which you'll find in your Bible right before Ruth, describe the setting of that time as bleak, leaderless, corrupt times when "no one was king in Israel." Not even God could be found among the idolatry and betrayal that had come to characterize the state of Israel.

There was a famine in the land, says our storyteller next. The Hebrew people often attributed such shifts in nature as signs from God. Those who had not abandoned God by now would have likely believed that the famine in Israel was directly related to the evil perpetrated at the highest levels of leadership. This is important to the story because, when we hear that a man from Bethlehem in Judah named Elimelech took his wife Naomi and their two sons to live in Moab for a while, we are not only watching them flee a famine for a place with a better food supply. They are also fleeing an Israel that does not honor God, whom this family clearly still desires to follow. They are fleeing corruption, violence, and despair.

It must have been quite awful for them in Israel, that they would travel to Moab. Moab was a four-letter-word to the Israelites. Moabites were not only looked down upon by Israelites, they were despised. Hated. Mocked. Throughout the early books of the Hebrew Bible, there are several encounters between Israelites and Moabites, and they are almost entirely hostile. In Deuteronomy, we even read that Moabites have been banned for ten generations from entering the assembly of the Lord.

Still, the family went to Moab and lived there. Nothing in the story indicates that Moab or the Moabites did any harm to the family. They have been allowed to settle and make a life in the very place they had looked down upon from the other side of the Dead Sea.

At some point during their time in Moab, Elimelech dies and Naomi becomes a widow. Now, Naomi's grief at what has befallen her home country is multiplied exponentially by grief at losing her husband and the hardship this will inevitably cause for a widow in a context where women had few avenues for self-sufficiency. Naomi's sons grow up and marry Moabite women. You might have noticed in the translation we read this morning that Naomi's sons took wives for themselves. Again, we might accept this as colloquial language for finding women to marry. But biblical scholar Dr. Wil Gafney wants us to read more closely and consider what might have actually happened.

The story of Ruth begins with a trauma, writes Dr. Gafney in *The People's Bible Companion*, she and Orpah are abducted from their home in Moab and forced into marriage in an Israelite family struggling to survive a famine.

She explains that the verb used here, in the Hebrew, is the same used in other texts to describe forcible abduction of and sexual violence against women.

After a decade of life together, no children have come into the family before both of Naomi's sons die. The Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah, must've been young when they were brought to live as part of Naomi's household, as even a decade later Naomi describes them as young enough to move on, find new husbands, and start families in Moab. Naomi, however, will return to Bethlehem, where she has heard that the famine has ended.

Let's pause here to unpack some of the themes we've already uncovered. The first chapter of this book is filled with events that we instinctively know must carry deep grief. Loss upon loss upon loss upon loss. Each loss narrated without elaboration, stated as fact without emotion, adds to the weight upon Naomi's shoulders. She has lost her home. Her husband. Her security and stability. Her sons. Her dreams of being a grandmother to Israelite grandchildren who would carry her family's legacy forward. Ruth and Orpah have also experienced loss and grief, whether we assume that grief stems from the loss of their husbands or from being taken from their families to begin with. Neither of them have children, which in that time would have been stigmatized in most cultures. So much of what has brought us to this point in the story is pain, suffering, disappointment, hopelessness.

The three women begin the journey to Bethlehem together, when Naomi suddenly speaks up. Can you imagine the mother-in-law and two daughters-in-law walking silently together on the road, different generations, different cultures and belief systems. So much has happened between them, almost none of it has been good. What keeps them in step as they start out together? Custom? Loyalty? Grief? Fear? Can you hear the loud silence between them as each of them walks along, deep in her own thoughts?

Naomi breaks the silence, stops, and seems to have come to a decision. The younger women should return home where they can remarry and start a new life for themselves in Moab. Is this an act of kindness on Naomi's part, knowing that she has nothing to offer them in Israel but the scorn and potential violence they will face as Moabite women and widows besides, not to mention the fact that clearly the Lord is against her? Or is Naomi looking to get rid of them, so burdened by her own suffering that just the sight of them reminds her of her pain and unrealized dreams?

You might have noticed the repetitive use in this chapter of the words turn and return. Turn back, turn away, return to where you were before and live like this whole episode never happened. One of the young women, Orpah eventually gives in to Naomi's argument and exits the story, returning to the life she had before she was taken as a wife. Sometimes we judge her for making the wrong decision, but perhaps that is unfair. We do not know what the rest of her story holds, but she has taken agency over her life and chooses for herself to make her home in Moab.

Ruth does not make the same choice. The more Naomi argues, the more Ruth is determined to stay by her side and continue to Bethlehem. In her commentary on Ruth, Kathleen A. Robertson Farmer emphasizes that the relationship between Ruth and Naomi is described by the narrator, not prescribed as a rule for anyone else's behavior. It begs the question for us, are we able to explore this story as unique to Ruth and Naomi and learn its lessons without using it as a defining word on how relationships must always work between women? Can we expand our viewpoint so that rather than identifying Orpah as the one who made a wrong decision and Ruth as the one who made the right decision, we instead see three women invested in complicated relationships with one another, each making the choices they need to make with sensitivity to one another's needs?

Each of these women finds themselves in a moment where the future they thought they'd have no longer exists. And each of them takes one next right step at a time. I'm reminded of what Pastor Laura often reminds us: that when the challenge or the struggle feels too big and too overwhelming, we need only focus on the next right thing, the next small step in the right direction. Perhaps this moment when Orpah's path diverges from the other women, we see that the next step in the right direction might not be universal.

Ruth shows up, at this point in the story as a risk-taker. Pay attention over the next few weeks to watch this theme of taking risks develop in her storyline. This won't be the last time she steps out of her comfort zone, beyond the script that might have been written for her by the culture. She chooses to continue to Bethlehem with Naomi, and not only does she make that choice, she cements it with these famous verses most of us think of when we hear mention of this book.

Wherever you go, I will go; and wherever you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried.

And so Naomi and Ruth return to Bethlehem, where the gossip mills begin turning as soon as they arrive. Naomi requests a name change, calling herself Mara to reflect that all that remains in her is bitterness. She can not show up as her former self anymore. Too much has happened. In the depth of her grief, she cannot show up any other way. But she does not show up alone. Ruth, the Moabite, bravely walks into Bethlehem alongside her mother-in-law, showing up with her and for her.

What would your name be, if you had to choose a name today that describes your present circumstances?

We begin here to see the unfolding of the redemption theme that will take shape throughout the rest of this story. As you ponder the questions and wonderings from chapter one this week, I leave you one more thought to consider.

The life Naomi had is gone. The life Ruth had is gone. But they are still alive, and they are taking the next right step, one by one. The story will bring redemption, but that does not mean everything will go back to the way it used to be. No amount of bitterness or nostalgia or grief will undo what has happened. And yet, even now as they enter Bethlehem and bravely make their home among gossip and quite likely disdain, redemption begins to mean for them a new arc to their story, a next chapter.

So I leave you to ponder this: is redemption about restoring what was? Or, perhaps, is redemption about who and what we are becoming? What do you know about who you are in Christ that informs this question for you?

Amen.

HYMN

I Surrender All

All to Jesus I surrender	I surrender all
All to him I freely give	I surrender all
I will ever love and trust him	All to thee my blessed savior
In his presence daily live	I surrender all

INSTITUTION OF COMMUNION

adapted from Will Ranney at abundant.com

God is with us. Let us pray.

It is good to be joyful as we give thanks to You, Holy God. You created us in your image and gave us life with your breath. Your love does not falter, even as we neglect that love. You liberated us from our bondage, and continue to ease our burden.

Today, with joy, and with all of Creation, we proclaim:

Holy, Holy, Holy

God of Power and Grace

Heaven and Earth are full of your glory

Hosanna in the highest

You are Holy God, and blessed is your Child Jesus. Your Spirit descended upon him so that he could proclaim good news to the poor, heal the sick, feed the hungry, cavort with sinners, and liberate the captive. His life gave birth to the church through a new covenant, one born out the Holy Spirit whose power dwells within us today.

On the night in which he gave himself over, Jesus took bread, gave thanks to you, God, and said, **“Take, eat, this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”**

After dinner, he took the cup, gave thanks, and said, “**This is my blood of the new covenant, poured out for you and for many. Drink from it in remembrance of me.**”

In remembering the mighty acts of Jesus, we offer ourselves as a living witness, proclaiming the mystery of faith: **Christ has died. Christ has risen. Christ will come again.**

Pour out your Spirit on we who gather in new ways and on the gift of these elements we receive. Make them be for us the body and blood of Jesus Christ, that we may be the body of Christ for the world.

As we share this table, we remember and lift up before you:

- all who are back to school and figuring out new ways to learn and teach and care
- those who offer healthcare and support in difficult circumstances
- those who are sick and suffering, those in need of miracles of hope and healing
- caregivers who are continuing to care with more challenges to accessing help
- those who feel isolated and alone or afraid
- our communities that face extended seasons of unrest, injustice
- those in the wake of disaster from fires, hurricanes, tornadoes, and more

Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayers. All honor and glory are yours. Thank you for this mystery of faith, where you have given yourself to us. May we go into the world strengthened by your Spirit, in a spirit of generosity, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

CLOSING SONG

The Lord's Prayer

Malotte arr. Richard Curtis

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

BENEDICTION

Families come get Bibles and take home supplies for Sunday School, Confirmation, and youth groups! And register in person if you haven't had a chance to do that yet!
Backpack Blessings!

Ice Cream!
Drive Thru Communion!

POSTLUDE

I'm Gonna Live So God Can Use Me
arr. Gregg Sewell