

Ruth 1:7-18, 22

**“I’m All In”**

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Roslindale Congregational Church, UCC, Roslindale, MA  
Twenty-Fourth Sunday after Pentecost, November 7, 2021

*The Reading:*

<sup>7</sup> So Naomi set out from the place where she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to go back to the land of Judah. <sup>8</sup> But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, “Go back each of you to your mother’s house. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. <sup>9</sup> The Lord grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband.” Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud. <sup>10</sup> They said to her, “No, we will return with you to your people.” <sup>11</sup> But Naomi said, “Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? <sup>12</sup> Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, <sup>13</sup> would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the Lord has turned against me.” <sup>14</sup> Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

<sup>15</sup> So she said, “See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.” <sup>16</sup> But Ruth said,

“Do not press me to leave you  
or to turn back from following you!  
Where you go, I will go;  
where you lodge, I will lodge;  
your people shall be my people,  
and your God my God.

<sup>17</sup> Where you die, I will die—  
there will I be buried.

May the Lord do thus and so to me,  
and more as well,  
if even death parts me from you!”

<sup>18</sup> When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

<sup>22</sup> So Naomi returned together with Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, who came back with her from the country of Moab. They came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

There’s a song in the musical *Hamilton* entitled “Who Lives, Who Dies, Who Tells Your Story.” The chorus asks: “And when you’re gone, who remembers your name? Who tells your story?”

This month, we will lift up some famous and not-so-famous individuals within the Hebrew Scriptures. We will remember their names and tell their stories. We will focus upon members of King David's family, people who were part of his lineage and thereby contributed to God's *greater* story: God's plans for us – a future with hope. **This week, we will concentrate on Ruth, David's great-grandmother.**

At the beginning of the sermon each week, we will take some interactive time. **This morning, I invite you to say aloud what you remember, if anything, about Ruth and her story...** (*Jean will field congregant responses and write them on the newsprint.*)

This is a good list! I will say a bit more about just one aspect worth remembering on this list: **the commitment Ruth made to Naomi, to her people, and to her God.**

You see, at the beginning of this story, these three women did *not* have a "future with hope." After Naomi's husband, Elimelech died, she was left a widow with few resources, dependent upon her sons. When her two boys died, it was worse, and their young Moabite wives, Ruth and Orpah, *also* became widows.

Widows without children didn't fare well in ancient Hebrew culture, or in Moab. They were quite vulnerable. The Law made no provision for their financial security; they couldn't inherit and unless they remarried, they were thrust upon their next-of-kin, or upon the charity of the community, and some even sold into slavery; on the lowest rung of society. Orpah and Ruth, young widows who were also childless, were stigmatized as if they had no purpose.

Orpah and Ruth could return to their parents' homes in Moab, but Naomi needed to return to her people in Bethlehem. If the daughters-in-law went with Naomi, there would be no guarantee that they could remarry or, as foreigners, that they would be accepted. Their personal grief and loss was the least of their worries!

Even with extremely limited prospects, Ruth made a commitment to her mother-in-law Naomi. Apparently, the two women shared a mutual affection, and Ruth treated Naomi with "hesed;" that's the Hebrew word for "loving kindness." So Ruth was ready to take the risky road to Bethlehem, as long as they could go together. Naomi was her family now. Ruth clung to her and would not let go! "I'm all in! Your people, my people, your God, mine!"

Can you think of a relationship *this* significant in *your* life? Where you are *all in*? Some couples, for instance, have Ruth's poetic promise read or sung at their weddings!

Ruth's commitment in devotion gave both of these women hope, and it made a huge difference in their future. Going out to glean in Boaz' fields put Ruth in the right place at the right time. It got her and her honorable behavior noticed. Boaz made a legal transaction and the couple, a marriage covenant, which gave *both* women security.

On top of all this, when Ruth's baby, Obed, came along, it was as if Naomi had a new lease on life too. She could delight in him and see further into the future. She could let go of the bitterness and trust God again.

Moreover, the commitment Ruth made to Naomi created a future with hope for *Israel*. Through their descendants, an anointed leader would be found when the country needed it.

**Do we realize then how important *our* commitments are?** Maybe we need this reminder from Ruth. Decisions we make from devotion shape us and pave the way for

God's hopeful future! *Our* promises matter. **The commitments you and I make individually and as the church contribute to the plans *God* is already working to bring to fruition.**

You probably expect me to make a connection to our season of stewardship and you would be right! The amount of the financial pledge matters less than the act of making a commitment of loving kindness to God, to the church, and each other. Because a pledge is a *regular* practice of donating, I have given more over time to Christ's work than I would have otherwise, and this act has kept me connected to others and shaped me into a different and better person than without it! Because I'm all in, I'm investing in a future with hope.

Commitment is essential to a good stewardship of the environment too. I know that it is fashionable and easy to be cynical about the promises nations have made to reduce carbon emissions and about what the UN Climate Change Conference in process in Scotland can actually accomplish. But Ruth reminds us that a future with hope depends upon collective commitment! Indeed, Queen Elizabeth sounded like Ruth and Naomi to me when she said recently, "None of us will live forever, but we are doing this not for ourselves but for our children and our children's children, and those who will follow in their footsteps."<sup>1</sup>

Your people, my people. Your God, my God. A legacy to remember. A story to tell. A future with hope.

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<sup>1</sup>Karla Adam, Brady Dennis, and Annie Linskey, "As High-stakes Climate Summit Begins, Biden Apologizes for U.S. withdrawal from Paris Accord," *The Washington Post*, November 1, 2021.