

Sept 12, 2021 **DARING GREATLY: Standing at the Crossroads**
Sermon by Rev. Gina Hendrickson

Ruth 1:1-17 Set as Two Readings:

First Reading Ruth 1:1-7

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion; they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah.

They went into the country of Moab and remained there. But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. When they had lived there about ten years, both Mahlon and Chilion also died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD had considered his people and given them food. So she 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.

Second Reading before Sermon: Ruth 1: 8-17

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. 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.

They said to her, “No, we will return with you to your people.” 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? 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, 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.”

Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. So she said, “See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.” 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.

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!”

This is the Word of God for the People of God...Thanks be to God!

I chose one of the most powerful, strong woman of God I have ever read about in Scripture for today’s message in the midst of our Daring Greatly series.

I chose the story of Ruth, because like this woman of faith; WE as a church are standing at the crossroads for a lot of reasons: we are in the midst of a season of change, transition and uncertainty and yet...a season also of untold possibilities.

The Book of Ruth begins by sharing the lives of 3 women who are literally standing at the crossroads; needing to pick a direction for their lives.



And so much has happened to them. Just listen to what they've been dealing with:

- A famine descended upon the region of Judah
- Naomi's husband dies
- Her two sons marry
- Ten years pass, both sons die
- Naomi and her daughter-in-laws must carry on alone.

All of this transpires in just the first 5 verses. It seems as though, by dispensing with all of this so quickly, the author of Ruth intended to set the stage for the real drama, to fashion a story in which to explore a series of important questions.

Questions that are as meaningful today as they were for 3 women standing along a dusty road thousands of years ago...

****What happens when people stand at the crossroads?**

****How does one find their true path in this world?**

****What role does love play in charting the course?**

****How do unforeseen consequences unfold from the choices we make AND
The relationships we enter into?**

****How is our character—meaning our values, our morals, our way of being—
forged by the way in which we improvise responses to what comes our way?**

The power of the book of Ruth is undeniable.

And It's an easy read, just four short chapters, but it packs a whallop that offers blessing to those who stand at the crossroads of life.



Three women embark on an almost predictable journey. Naomi, the Jewish matriarch is heading back to the region of Judah and her hometown. She's heard the famine is no longer plaguing their people.

She then—while quite literally standing at the crossroads somewhere on the road between Moab and Bethlehem—Naomi instructs Orpah and Ruth, her Moabite daughter-in-laws to return to their mother's houses.

“Then she kissed them and they wept aloud.”

It is here at the crossroads that we have the first outward signs of emotion in the story... There has been so much loss, so much pain and grief, but only now do we hear them cry.

Orpah chooses to leave, to return to her own mother and extended family— for support and care, safety and hope for the future.

But then something unexpected, something quite extraordinary happens. Ruth steps off the edge of the world and follows her heart.

It's a response that's not geographical—not north or south; east or west— It's a SOUL STEP...from deep, deep within.

Ruth clings to her mother-in-law and pleads: *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. Where you die, I will die—there I will be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, If even death parts me from you!*

It is one of the most passionate and powerful covenants of love made between two people in the bible.

**So much is contained in this one sacred moment at the crossroads.

--First, it is a blessing, a gift that Ruth recognizes this as a crossroads moment, That she sees it as a moment of choice...AND that she sees she has some power to exercise over her future.

Ruth has lost her husband, her brother-in-law, her father-in-law, her sister-in-law Orpah has just left...now she may lose even Naomi...but she recognizes the moment has come to make a **choice**.

Now for just a brief moment, let's think about how hard that is...So much of the time we can't see that about our lives...That in any given moment lies the possibility for change...For taking control...For claiming one's life as one's own.

It's hard to stand at the crossroads of pain or loss, Emotional upheaval or anxiety, of change or transition... And **SEE the possibilities** that lie before us...For growth...for taking control...for claiming our life anew. It's hard!

But Ruth does, and she is blessed with further vision: She discovers an organizing principle on which to base her choice. Until this moment on the road, we know nothing of the life she came from, Nothing of Ruth's life w/her husband & his family or even her family of origin.



We can only imagine what it is she is choosing to leave behind. But her words are so full of love, animated by a tender yet powerful passion.

Ruth doesn't know what's in store for her if she returns to her own mother's house, or What is in store for her if she veers from that course to walk with Naomi.

What she does know is that she cannot ignore the strength of her instinct: Where you go I will go...Your people shall be my people...And your God my God.

And here it is...while standing at the crossroads, Ruth has decided to claim the God of Naomi, of Abraham, Isaac & Jacob. She sees life...even in the midst of loss, pain and uncertainty.

Unlike Naomi, who later upon her return to Bethlehem when greeted by the women of the town, will cry out: "No longer call me Naomi, but call me Mara—which means bitter—because the Lord has dealt bitterly with me and brought calamity upon me." (1:19-21)

Unlike Naomi, Ruth is not allowing this life transition, this crossroads moment, To discourage or embitter her. **She has chosen to rely only upon Naomi's God AND the strength of her love for her mother-in-law.



Ruth has chosen to rely upon God AND love.

She lets go of the past...to embrace the future w/great faithfulness.

--Ruth has found her true path in this world while standing at the crossroads.

--Love has helped chart the course thru Ruth's choices & thru her relationships, as revealed in her commitment to Naomi & her eventual marriage to Boaz.

--Her love, dedication, strength and faithfulness—her character—is later praised by all who know her and proclaim that Ruth's worth to Naomi is greater than 7 sons. (4:15)

In a culture that placed little value on women and no value on foreign gentiles this is an unprecedented declaration of praise.

Ruth's choice at that crossroad moment in her life is a game changer of epic proportion...as made plain in the final verses of the Book:

- Ruth has a son named Obed who became the father of Jesse,
- Who became the father of David, the eventual King of Israel; (4:13-17)
- Who, as revealed in the Gospel of Matthew's geneology, continues the Messianic line leading to Jesus Christ himself. (Mt 1:5)

Ruth, while standing at the crossroads by faith and through love—Taking that SOUL STEP...Became God's unlikely & creative avenue of grace continuing the line of the Messiah. And the world has forever been changed.

I told you the Book of Ruth packs a wallop!



Standing at the crossroads...What crossroads are you facing in your life today?

--My friends, many of us are standing at the crossroads of grief and loss.

This past year, we've lost so many loved ones: husbands, wives, sisters, brothers, fathers, mothers, grandparents, friends, colleagues...so many who have died.

**How do WE emerge from loss and mourning?

--Some are at the crossroads of career: You're looking for the right job, or being just laid off from one, Or wondering just how real of a possibility retirement could be this year, wondering if your paycheck can cover this month's bills...

How is our character—our values and morals—being forged by these crossroad moments? By the way in which we improvise responses to what life brings our way?

--Some are making life choices for our parents, or spouses; our kids or grandkids...

How do we mediate the boundaries between ourselves & those we choose to care for?

Or those we're obligated to care for? How does love inform our care? And the choices we make? --Friends, we as a church are standing at the crossroads: What path do we want to take as the Body of Christ here in Moorestown?

Do we want to stay stuck in the past of how things "used to be" be it 20 years ago, or 6 years or 19 months ago before the church and world shut down due to the pandemic?

Will we get mired down in the grief and loss of leaders or saints of this church from death, or moves or those who desired a new a new spiritual home for whatever reason?

OR...can we, like Ruth, let go of struggles from the past & release our fears of what may come on this new journey...in order to embrace the future with great faithfulness and love? What does a "soul step" look like for our congregation?

And...friends...I KNOW how hard that is...



It's hard to stand at the crossroads of life, where choices need to be made...to pick a direction and then move forward. To step out in faith, trusting your heart to dare greatly in love & hope.

Crossroad moments often come amidst pain or loss, they bring emotional upheaval or anxiety...

But they can also allow us to SEE the possibilities that lie before us for change, for growth...for taking control...for claiming our life as God's faithful ones.

But here we stand...At the crossroads...Life is full of crossroad moments...What choices will we make?

- To worship weekly virtually or in-person—or to take another path on Sun mornings...
- To make that call to repair a broken relationship or keep the silence
- To join a small group at church this month or not
- To serve or not to serve
- To take a path and teach SS or become a member of the choir or praise band
- To give of our time, talents, gifts & treasure to a hurting & needy world...
OR to not give of ourselves
- To walk at home, at work, at school...as if we were here at church
- To be ready to keep adapting to who and what God needs us to become
As a church...OR remain in our own comfort zone

Do we say yes to God's nudge to take the path that our Lord desires for us? Individually and corporately?

~Daring Greatly, I said yes to a new appointment in July...~Daring Greatly Pastor Jess said yes as well...
Serving together HERE for a time such as this.

~Daring Greatly, First Church said yes to setting a new vision & direction. For the church & we have begun a SOUL STEP journey w/The Unstuck Grp.

These are crossroad moments...Crossroad moments bring change...to churches...to leaders...to families...to each and every one of us.

--Maybe you're at a crossroads moment asking yourself: "What's next?"

- You attend Bible study...or sing in KRR or the choir
- You go to Youth Group...
- You are part of the Prayer ministry or quilting group...

And you KNOW...because of the love you experience there... The relationships you have made...

You know that there's another direction God is now calling you to move toward. ~Is it the path toward a saving relationship with Jesus Christ or to inviting someone to come with you to youth group, or worship or Bible Study or to quilt some blankets?

~Is it to Dare Greatly and step up and lead a class or study or small group virtually, so that you and others can keep growing deeper with what has begun to take root within you?

~Maybe today is the day you decide to reach out to a family member, friend or co-worker and extend the gift of forgiveness and reconciliation?

Crossroad moments bring change...to each and every one of us...to churches...to leaders...to families...to communities.

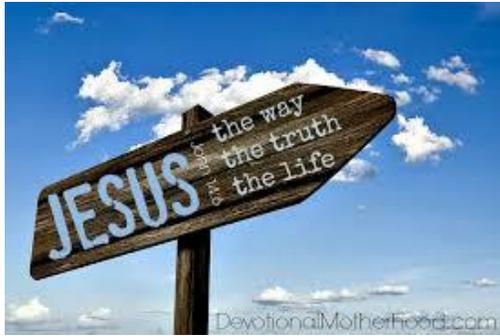


Friends, Life will always bring us to crossroad moments...

Today, like Ruth so long ago, we need to SEE the possibilities that lie before us for change...for growth...for claiming our life as God's faithful ones...while standing at the crossroads.

~Today we can claim the One God of Ruth and Naomi, the God of David and Jesse, the God of Mary and Joseph—to offer new life and hope, even amidst our own fear, struggle, grief or uncertainty.

~By faith in the One God as revealed in and through Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit; we can find our true path in this world.



~Like Ruth, by relying on God and love, we can stand at the crossroads and recognize the moment of choice we have...and that "choice" can be a gift...a blessing...

Because in that given moment lies the possibility for change...For taking control...for claiming one's life anew by the grace of God. And in and through the love of Jesus Christ.

When we can let go of the past, in order to dare greatly...And SOUL STEP into the future by faith—WE like, Ruth, can find our true path in this world.

Let us Dare Greatly and rely upon God and Love so that we too may become God's unlikely & creative avenues of grace To a hurting and needy world. May it be so for all of us. Amen and amen.