

Confirmation of Elisha Gullixson, McKinnen Irvin, & Gracie Schroeder

Christ is Risen... **He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!**

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Beloved by God, especially you Gracie, McKinnen, and Elisha,
who today are confirming your belief & understanding of the faith given & sealed to you at Baptism.

As we continue our stroll through the Old Testament this year, and consider the time of the Judges of Israel, realize that it was not a wonderful time for God's faithful people. The author of Judges reports how "**every man did what was right in his own eyes,**" Judges 17:6 – as opposed to doing what was right in the Lord's eyes... that is, living according to His Word.

But graciously, we also get to read the book of Ruth and see that not all Israel was faithless. In the midst of the increasingly godless society, shines a refreshing and encouraging story of faithfulness. A timely encouragement for us, who live in a very similar cultural environment. So let's meditate on these first verses from the book of Ruth. *...as follows in Jesus' name:*

In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his 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. They lived there about ten years, and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the Lord had visited His people and given them food. So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each of you to her 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 rest, each of you in the house of her husband!" Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. And 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? Have I yet 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. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, would you therefore wait till they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me." Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

And 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 urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you." And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.^(ESV)

The summary of Naomi's life starts off as many of the stories of our lives could:
with a mixture of blessings and hardships.

Elimelech and Naomi had been richly blessed with two sons.

At one point, due to a famine in Israel, they picked up and moved to and temporarily lived in Moab.

While living in that foreign land, each son blessedly took a wife.

And it appears that Chilion & Mahlon had been godly husbands, diligent in their family's catechesis because as the women talk with each other in our text, they speak fluently about God's actions & blessings.

But then, tragedy struck and all three of these godly men died, leaving Naomi in a foreign land and responsible for her two daughters-in-law.

She **went out full** but was returning to her home **empty** (as she would say a few verses later ^{1:21}).

Many of us can relate to this, too, I think... some tragic or life-altering hardship

that left you feeling alone and without help – even that **the Lord was dealing very bitterly with you.**

But even in this distress and bitter suffering, we have a beautiful example of this faithful woman expressing her complaints and frustrations, while still acknowledging the Lord's mercy.

Listen to Naomi as she's speaking to her daughters-in-law,

she invokes the Lord's grace and blesses them, "**May the Lord deal kindly with you...**

The Lord grant that you may find rest..."

She blesses in the Lord's name, even as she says, "**the hand of the Lord has gone out against me.**"

It's reminiscent of what Job had cried out in his affliction, "**Though He slay me, I will hope in Him.**"

And it's as though St. Paul took a note out of Naomi's story when he wrote in Romans 8:28 - Job 13:15

**We know that for those who love God all things work together for good,
for those who are called according to His purpose.**

...

As we have here before us these three young confirmands, let's take a moment to consider the reality.

[To confirmands:] As you will give your pledge before God and this Christian congregation today

that you *intend to continue steadfast in the confession of this Church, and suffer all, even death,
rather than fall away from it,*

realize that you are acknowledging that your life, especially your life as a Child of God in this world, is not guaranteed to be easy, or comfortable, or even entirely happy.

You are not pledging to be faithful to God "so long as your life is 'good in your eyes.'"

Like Naomi and Ruth, you are saying that – no matter how bitter life might get...

no matter how much you might FEEL that **the hand of the Lord has gone out against you** – yet you will hope and trust in Him.

And Ruth's wonderful response to Naomi is also appropriate for us to meditate on in this vein.

For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge.

Your people shall be my people, and your God my God.

Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried.

Ruth is not just attaching herself to Naomi... she is cleaving to her God and Savior, through Naomi.

She doesn't want to be separated from Naomi, who is, at this time, her lifeline to the household of God...

If you want to think of it in modern terms, Ruth is clinging not just to Naomi, but to the Church... and not just to the Church but to Christ, her Lord.

To be separated from Naomi now and return home would basically be, as Naomi said of Oprah, to go “**back to her people and to her gods.**”

Ruth even makes a vow in the Lord’s name, saying “**the Lord do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you...**”

She realized that there was no other choice. The Lord isn’t just a preference of one god over others. He is the only true God... and more than that, He is their Redeemer... their Savior.

It’s as if they were confessing right along with Job:

I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last He will stand upon the earth.

And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God. Job 19:25-26

These widows, who had suffered the pain of separation from their husbands by death, clung firmly to the Lord’s redemption... and the promise of the resurrection to life eternal, not only for their husbands, but also for themselves.

They believed the Lord’s promises to send a Savior in our flesh and blood to redeem us.

Though their worlds had been turned upside down, God’s Word and promise still remained, as Isaiah poetically said,

The grass withers, the flower fades, but the Word of our God will stand forever. Isaiah 40:8

...

And as the Lord has often done in His plan of salvation, He used a bitter situation to showcase His mercy. The Lord gave yet another picture of our Savior in sending Boaz to redeem them.

The story of Ruth goes on to recount how Boaz, a righteous man (and relative) steps in to save them. First he provided a safe place for Ruth to work and harvest grain.

Then he agreed to marry Ruth, and buy back (or redeem) her inheritance, at great cost to himself.

And it was through this marriage that the Lord raised up a certain child, Obed, who fathered Jesse, who fathered King David, who was the ancestor of Jesus, our Savior and Redeemer.

So, in truth, this account isn’t so much a story of Naomi’s & Ruth’s faithfulness, but God’s faithfulness.

The Lord was faithful to Elimelech, Chilion and Mahlon, keeping them faithful even unto death.

The Lord was faithful to Naomi and Ruth, providing for their welfare, even in their afflictions.

So their faithfulness was completely a response to God’s faithfulness to them, even when not felt/seen.

They cleaved to His promises, who had never broken a promise yet.

...

I suppose by now then, it’s rather obvious the correlation between their lives and ours,

even between Ruth’s vow and the one many of us have taken and three of us will take today.

The Lord is the one and only true God. There are no other options that exist.

He has been faithful and kept His promises to our human race in sending a Savior to redeem us, to live, die, and rise again *for us men and for our salvation.* Nicene Creed

For you, Jesus was faithful in a faithless world, cleaving to and trusting His Father throughout His life; and NOTHING – not even death – separated them.

For you, and at great cost to Himself, Jesus offered up His body/shed His blood to redeem you, *a lost and condemned sinner, purchased and won you from all sin, death and the power of the devil.*

For you, Jesus was raised up... for your justification - to declare you righteous and holy before God.

And now, by the work of the Holy Spirit, He faithfully calls you through the Gospel, enlightens and sanctifies you and keeps you in the one true faith –

HE keeps you faithful, just as He did Ruth and Naomi.

And He *gathers* you to and in *the Christian Church* where He *daily and richly forgives you and all believers all our sins.*

Where/when you struggle and are tempted like Orpah to turn back, whether in good or difficult days,
the Lord deal kindly with you,
the Lord give you rest in the gracious promises and comfort of Jesus Christ, your only Redeemer,
the Lord bless and keep you faithful to His promises, so that nothing, not even death separates you from His love and faithfulness as it is in Jesus Christ, your Redeemer.

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Christ is Risen... **He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!**

Soli Deo Gloria