

# “The Story of Ruth”

A dramatic monologue written and acted  
by Rev. Kimberly Heath

November 4, 2018  
Ruth 1:1-18 (the Message)

Rev. Kimberly Heath  
Wall Street United Church

*Ruth is also mentioned in Luke, chapter 1, as a great-grandmother of Jesus.*

"A young woman dressed in robes enters the Sanctuary, looks around at everyone, and begins to speak . . . "

Who would have guessed I'd be here today? It is all because of the great love of one. I found someone who was worthy of my dedication and love and devotion. You probably think I am talking about the Lord God. No, I am not talking about the Lord — I didn't even know or trust this God. Not at first, anyway. No, I'm talking about Naomi; my mother-in-law. I know there aren't many who would describe their mother-in-law that way. I mean... why do they bury mother-in-laws 18 feet down, when everyone else is buried 6 feet down? .....Because, deep, deep down, they really are very nice people.☺! And, what's the difference between outlaws and in-laws? Outlaws are "Wanted!!"

Naomi isn't your typical mother-in-law. I'm really so blessed. Not that anyone else saw it that way. My friends and family were whispering that I was cursed. What was I thinking, marrying an Israelite man, they wanted to know? I certainly didn't marry for the money — his family came to Moab with nothing. They were starving and desperate. They didn't leave Bethlehem because they wanted to: they left because they had to. But Naomi was so kind, and her son was so sweet and good looking. There were a lot of girls in my family so my father wasn't particular about who I married, as long as I did marry. 'Too many women in one house is a burden'—that's what he said.

I did wonder briefly if there was a curse on Naomi's family. Not only had they come because of a famine, but Elimelech, my father-in-law, died soon after they arrived. Naomi did manage to find wives for her two sons: me and Orpah, but *then* neither one of us managed to have children *and if you can believe it*, within a short time . . . ah, sorry, it's still hard . . . both my husband and Orpah's husband also died.

I was devastated, but it just about destroyed Naomi. I've heard 'What doesn't kill you makes you stronger' but it's a lie! She might have been alive physically, but on the inside she became a hollow shell. She was empty. She had arrived in Moab with an empty food basket, and now she had an empty and broken heart. Nothing about her grief was going to make her stronger. She insisted we not call her Naomi anymore – which means "pleasant", but instead Mara, which means "bitter".

There was nothing for her anymore in Moab. I'm not even sure she wanted to live, but if she was going to survive she knew she had to go back to Bethlehem, back to where she had relatives. She told us to go back to our homes. She had nothing to offer. She had nothing anymore to give to us or to anyone.

Orpah went home. But I couldn't. I just couldn't leave her. I had loved my husband and I loved his sweet mother and I could not leave her. Honestly, I don't think she would have made it back to Bethlehem without me.

I made a commitment to her then and there. **I would not leave her!**

I will go where you go, I will live where you live;  
your people will be my people, your God will be my God.

I will die where you die and be buried beside you.

May the Lord punish me if we are ever separated, even by death!"

I have realized in the years that have passed that there is no force in the world more powerful than love and caring, combined with commitment. Love that takes a stand will not be moved. No matter what difficulties it faces, love can do *anything!*

You know, I knew precious little about her people or her home or even about her God. But I did know Naomi. I knew she was good. I trusted that her people and her God would be something like her.

Bethlehem: house of bread. I hoped the place would live up to its name – a place where we might find fullness in our bodies and in our hearts. But I wasn't going to get my hopes up too high. Naomi had only distant relatives who might not want our extra burden, and I was a foreigner. Her people did not like Moabites like me. I knew we would likely eke out our lives and die in poverty.

We arrived back at harvest time, and it was a good harvest too. That was our first stroke of luck, because I was counting on the leftovers. I went to a field of a large landowner and started gleaning. I followed behind those harvesting and picked up what was left. It was not a lot, but it was enough. Still Naomi was afraid for me, a foreign woman alone with no one to defend me. I kept my wits about me and I wasn't too worried.

Bethlehem is a small town. The bad thing about living in a small town is that everyone knows your business; but the good thing about living in a small town is that everyone knows your business! They knew who I was. I was odd to them for sure, but they knew I had returned with Naomi. They knew about all of the bad luck we'd had. At first, it felt like they stayed away from me because they were afraid they would catch the curse that was following us. But as it turned out, the owner of the land noticed me. He told his men to leave me alone, and he told the women who were harvesting to intentionally leave some barley behind for me to collect. And later, he came to me and told me I was welcome there, not to be afraid, and that he appreciated what I had done for Naomi.

It seemed like our luck was starting to change. Naomi had been so vacant—that's the only way I can describe it. But when I told her about the land owner Boaz, and what he said to me, she just seemed to ... come alive. Actually, she changed almost overnight! Get this! It turns out that Boaz was a distant relative of hers! I know, right?! What are the odds?! Let me tell you, this just put a bit of a spring in her step and a sneaky little spark in her eyes! She was convinced there was more to this encounter! I thought she was dreaming in technicolour, but it was so great seeing her all full of vim and vigour! She was full of something, that's for sure! You haven't met a matchmaker on a mission until you've met a Jewish mother! Once she had that idea in her head she wouldn't let go. "Boaz will be our Redeemer!" she said.

In Jewish law, when a man dies, rather than just lose his property and inheritance of his piece of the Promised Land, a close family member could take on the gift and the burden of this property for the dead relative, and therefore continue on the family line and inheritance.

So she told me to change out of my clothes for mourning and get prettied and perfumed up. She had the whole plan laid out. I went at night to where he and his workers would be threshing the barley—sifting out the chaff from the good grain. Once he'd eaten and had a few drinks and was asleep, I went and lay down at his feet. I know it sounds strange. I didn't know if this was some strange Jewish custom or some scheme my mother-in-law hatched. I didn't ask. I just did it. Either it would work and he would agree to be our Redeemer—to marry me — or it wouldn't. ... I've never been so afraid. ... I wasn't nearly this afraid traveling just two women alone from Moab or working alone in the field.

But this was terrifying. I was terrified I would fail and let my dear Naomi down. If it failed; if I failed, the flicker of life in Naomi would be

stomped on again; and really, what would a wealthy and successful man like Boaz want with a foreigner – especially one as unlucky as me?

Naomi and I had prayed to her God, that he would remember us and take care of us. That he would provide for us. And the Lord God answered our prayer. That night Boaz did offer to redeem us, to cover us with his cloak of protection. He would marry me. He would be our redeemer. I couldn't believe it.

They say "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger." That's a lie. But I'll tell you what does make you stronger. Love. The love of my dear mother-in-law Naomi. The love of my redeemer husband. And the love of their God, who is now my God. You see, in the end it was Jehovah who is our great Redeemer. He did not forget about one so unfortunate and hurt by life as Naomi, and he did not forget me, a foreigner. Neither will he forget you! I look back and realize that the Lord God was with us all along. He took our mourning and turned it into dancing!

Oh! I almost forgot. You know how strange it seemed to me that a man as good as Boaz, not to mention as wealthy, would be willing to extend such kindness to a foreigner like me? I eventually found out it wasn't strange at all. Boaz knew all about foreigners and our call to welcome them. It turns out his mother was a foreigner (and a prostitute!). Rahab. She helped some Jewish spies before they attacked Jericho. That's his mother! He wasn't a 'pure' Israelite himself. But God blessed his mother for her courage and faith and God blessed Boaz and now God has blessed us. I do believe God has a plan in all of this. I wonder if God has a plan for our little baby, Obed, or maybe for our grandchildren or great-grandchildren? I pray there will be more Redeemers in our family line; more who care for and save the outcast, the foreigner, the grieving and the broken. Do you know, Naomi's friends said that I, Ruth, was better than 7 sons? (Top that! 😊) She said that even before Boaz had come along, that I had helped to redeem her.

I had never thought of it that way before. But we all need someone who will stand firm in love to help us in a difficult time. Maybe you can do that for someone? I pray that if you don't fit in, or if you are broken by life, that you will have a redeemer in your life. Do not forget the Lord God, who is my Redeemer and yours. I promise He has not forgotten you!

Amen.

May God make it so.

