

AUG 18, 2024

Marion weekly update

FIRST UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Aug 11 sermon— ‘Heroes and Villains : Naomi’ Ruth 1:6-15, Ruth 3:16-18

This week we have a perhaps unexpected heroine in our series. This week we consider Naomi. Naomi is the mother in law of Ruth, who has an entire book named after her. Ruth rightfully garners much of the chatter in these scriptures, however Naomi deserves a lot of credit and attention as well.

The story goes that Naomi and her husband, both Israelites, moved away from their homeland because of a food shortage. They landed in Moab. Their two sons married Moabite women, Ruth and Orpha. Sadly circumstances worked such that Naomi’s husband and both sons died leaving all three women without husbands or means.

As the trouble in her homeland had passed, Naomi purposed to return. Wanting a bright future for her daughters in law she encouraged them to return to their people to seek out other husbands. The levirate marriage tradition demanded that the women marry brothers of their deceased husbands to produce offspring in their dead husband’s name and carry on their line. Naomi released them from this knowing that she was beyond child bearing years and not wanting Ruth and Orpha to be widows and single for the rest of their years without means of support.

While Orpha returns to her people, Ruth is determined to stay with Naomi and support her wherever she goes. Naomi advises Ruth regarding how to live in the midst of a strange people familiar to Naomi but foreign to Ruth. In the end both not only survive but thrive with Ruth finding a husband in Boaz and being a part in the line that brought Jesus into the world.

Understandably the book of Ruth follows the story of Ruth herself. Naomi is in the wings but her role is incredibly significant and I would even deem heroic. Without Naomi Ruth would have had no direction. She would have had not sense of navigating a strange land or a strange people. The key to unlocking all of this was her mother in law.

So what does Naomi teach us?

She teaches us about others first love. When she instructed her daughters in law to go back to their people there was only one thing forefront in her mind. She was loving Ruth and Orpha. Her own future was uncertain. She was planning to return to Israel in the hope that she would secure some form of future but nothing was guaranteed. What she wanted was the best future for the other, even pushing them away when the offer was made to stand by her side.

This should be the goal for every one of us who follows Christ. Seeking the best for the other. In the case of most heroism selflessness is a foundational necessity. Certainly this doesn’t mean we neglect our own responsibilities and such. There is a balance. However when all things are considered, whatever we can do to put others first should be done. The very first tenet our kids recite in TKD class is “Courtesy-I put others before myself”. This isn’t just a Naomi thing, it’s not just a Christian thing, it’s a human thing that is engrained in us by our Creator. Preferring others over ourselves is the key to community, to a thriving corporate existence, and to relationships that are strong and fulfilling.

Naomi also demonstrates for us the importance of guiding those who are new/younger and are new to any given scene. In our circumstance the scene of faith is central and a priority.

Naomi wasn’t the primary actor in the book of Ruth. Ruth was. Who was the one directing Ruth in how she should move forward? Who gave her the information about how to thrive when she accompanied this aged woman to a new land? It was Naomi. Naomi was the source of wisdom that Ruth needed. Without her Ruth’s ability to act in a fashion that would be appropriate and yield good results would have been relatively nonexistent.

Naomi demonstrates that the hero isn’t always the one in the spotlight!

The hero many times is the one who takes the time and energy to impart their knowledge and wisdom to the one who can act upon it. It’s the teacher who inspires the student to greater and greater things that change the world. It’s the parent the raises the child with values that impact lives beyond their own.

When we think hero so frequently the image is the one at center stage and doing all the action. As life wears on and sometimes our bodies begin to wear out there can be fear that the ability to be used heroically of God passes us by. Nothing is further from the truth.

The impact of the hero, like Naomi, is what earns that label. Heroes can be quiet, unassuming, and behind the scenes. It doesn't make their selflessness, their contribution, or their ability to change a life or a world any less significant or necessary.

As our lives and giftings change, is it not profoundly heroic to refuse to accept that our ability to transform ourselves and the world is over? We don't pack up shop and rest on our laurels. We push ever onward and forward, using whatever knowledge and wisdom we've received through the years to be examples and guides for others.

One of the greatest misused and untrue comments made at the expense of teachers is that "those who can't 'do' teach". No. Often it is those that have done who are equipped to teach. Perhaps past an active prime, they purpose themselves to not allow their experience and understanding fade away and go to waste. They follow the call to show others so that a skill or message will persist into the future.

Each of us have this calling as disciples of Christ. Our work is never done. Even though heroism might look differently at different stages of life, heroism is still in our grasp when we follow Christ and His instruction to love one another and to influence the world to transform it by bringing others into relationship with Him.

Naomis are all around us and have impacted each of us. If you are a Naomi, please know that you are seen. Those you guide and influence see you well and hold you dear. Their success is yours. Every time you feel the humble pride of your student when they impact the world, what you are feeling is the "well done" of the God who called you to live into your task.