

The Reverend Marjo Anderson

**2-Narrative 06 – Ruth and Naomi
Ruth 1:1-17 (Mark 8:34-35)**

**13 October 2019
Salem, Bridgeport**

“That We May Be Filled”

Ruth lay on her back, eyes wide open, unable to sleep.

Just 6 moons ago she had been happy.

Though she had not been blessed with a child,

she had loved her husband and felt blessed to be a part of his family, foreigners though they were..

And now? Her life had totally fallen apart.

First her father-in-law had died.

It had been hard on Naomi emotionally,

but between Mahlon’s and Chilon’s businesses they had been able to support her financially.

But then Chilon had gotten sick.

After just a few weeks he had died and her sister-in-law Orpah had been devastated.

And poor Naomi - first her husband and then her son.

That put the burden of all of them on her husband, Mahlon, but he would handle it.

Except he didn’t.

He had started with that same cough Chilon had had, and within the month, he, too, had succumbed.

And there they were - 3 widows.

Normally they would have become the responsibility of their husbands’ male relatives,

but Elimilech and Naomi had come to Moab alone and there were no relatives here.

They were women so they couldn’t own property, and they couldn’t work –

well not unless they wanted to become prostitutes.

They had pitched a small tent on Orpah’s father’s land, but that was all the family could offer.

The country was in the grip of a famine – and there just wasn’t enough food to go around – even if they had had money.

She had had only a little bread and some water for the past 3 days.

And there was no one who could make it better,

no one who could wrap his arms around her,

no one who could reassure her that everything would be ok.

What had she done to deserve this? What had any of them done?

How had they angered the gods? Why didn’t they answer her prayers?

What good was even believing in them anymore?

Her faith had been strong, but each devastating blow had weakened it until it was now gone.

As she lay there she realized that her entire self ached –

her stomach ached from hunger, her heart ached from loneliness, and her spirit ached from despair.

Her stomach, her heart, and her spirit were all empty, so empty, so very, very empty.

Ruth was hungry of body, lonely of heart and empty of spirit.

And what about us?

Is anyone here hungry physically, materially, economically?

While many here have enough food, there may be people in these pews who are food insecure.

While many here have nice homes,

there are some who struggle to pay the rent or the utility bill or put gas in their car.

While many here have adequate retirement and investment income,

others live with the constant worry that they will outlive their resources.

Like Ruth there are people here who know what it is to be hungry.

Is anyone here lonely of heart?

While I’m there may be some happy marriages many are not that lucky.

A friend confessed to me recently that he married the wrong person 35 years ago

and said that he’s never been happy but at least he’s learned to be satisfied.

And compared to those in loveless, or conflicted, or abusive relationships he’s lucky.

Then there are those who are widowed or divorced or just never found the right person.

Like Ruth, there are people who know what it is to be lonely.

Is anyone here empty of spirit?

While I'm sure there are people of deep faith here,
there are many who,

while they find comfort in seeing familiar faces and singing familiar songs and reciting familiar words,
may never have had God touch their heart and fill their spirit in such an amazing way
that they can't help but share!

Like Ruth, there are people who know what it's like to have an empty spirit.

The deep truth of our reading today is that even in Ruth's hunger of body and loneliness of heart and emptiness of spirit,
God was already at work preparing to fill her.

But here's the thing.

Ruth could not just stay where she was and expect things to change.

As long as she kept on doing what she was doing, she would only get what she had always got.

She had to be willing to let go of the little she still had.

She had to be willing to leave everything that was familiar and comforting and known behind.

She had to choose faith over fear, belief over doubt, a future different from her past.

She had to ignore her reasonable and rational thoughts and instead follow the desire that God had placed in her heart.

Because that's exactly how God works.

God had a plan for Ruth.

She didn't know what that plan was at the time.

All she knew was that she needed to go with Naomi

and in order to do that she would need to leave everything else behind.

She didn't know what God had planned but God knew.

God knew that in Bethlehem Ruth would meet the love of her life.

God knew that they would get married and have a child.

God knew that that child would have descendants,

one of whom would be a boy named David who would become the greatest king of Israel,

and one of whom would be a boy named Jesus who would become King of kings and Lord of lords.

Like Ruth we are sometimes hungry of body, lonely of heart or empty of spirit.

And God wants nothing more than to fill us,

But in order for that to happen we, like Ruth,

need to be willing to give up everything else in order to follow where God leads.

If we don't have enough money for food, maybe we need to take that job that would mean moving.

If we aren't happy in a relationship maybe we need to seek counseling.

If our spirits are not filled with joy, maybe we need to try worshipping or praying in a new way.

Every week we remind ourselves why we are here:

we come to be transformed by God's love so that we can share our joy.

We come here to be transformed, to be changed, to be filled.

If you come here week after week and nothing in your life changes, then we need to talk.

God knows your hunger. God knows your emptiness. God knows your despair.

And God wants nothing more than to fill your every need.

Today God is calling you to leave the familiar, the comforting, the same-old-same-old behind,
and travel to a new and strange and promised land.

It's a journey of faith, not of fact, and we can't know what challenges or obstacles or dangers we'll face.

But we can trust that if we follow the desire that God has placed in our hearts,

God will be waiting to feed us, to love us, and to fill us with a joy like we have never known before.

May you have the courage, the faith, and the hope to follow where God leads. **Amen**