

Pentecost 21 10/9/16
Ruth 1:1-19a 23C

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.

And, “Uff da!” is all you can say to that. I hate to sound like Dr. Phil, but what was he thinkin’? To quote SSG Robinson, It had to be a sudden attack of the stupid.

Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their two boys, Mahlon and Chilion, were Ephrathites living in Bethlehem in Judah. They lived in the Promised Land. The land of wheat and barley. The land of pomegranates and fig trees. The land flowing with milk and honey. They even lived in Bethlehem, which means the “House of Bread.” In the Promised Land, there is food in abundance.

At least, that’s the way it’s supposed to be. But, in the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. What caused that famine? Was it disease, was it drought, was it a locust plague? No, the honest among the Israelites would blame themselves for the famine that was in the land.

I. You see, in the days when the judges ruled the land, EVERYONE DID WHAT WAS RIGHT IN THEIR OWN EYES. The problem with that is that what is right in your own eyes is not what is right in God’s eyes. In fact, it is downright evil. So evil in fact, God in His justice sent the Midianites into the Promised Land. And you know what the Midianites did,

right? They destroyed crops; destroying what Israel planted. And that meant no food and no food, meant there was a famine in the land.

So, what was Elimelech, his wife, Naomi, and their two growing boys, Mahlon and Chilion, supposed to do about that? He knows exactly what to do about that – he loaded up the truck and moved, moved to the land of Moab.

He goes to where there is food. Abram, Isaac, and Jacob each faced famine, and each sojourned to where there is food.

Isn't that interesting? So when Elimelech loaded up the truck and moved, was he following the example of Abram, Isaac and Jacob or was he doing what is right in his own eyes? Here is why I ask you that question: Abram, Isaac, and Jacob had all received the promise of the Promised Land, but none of them lived in Promised Land. So, when they went and sojourned to where there was food, they were not abandoning God. Here's the difference: Elimelech lived in the Promised Land. The Israelites had had taken possession of the land promised to Abram, Isaac, and Jacob. Elimelech's mailing address was Bethlehem of Judah. And as a son of Israel, he knew exactly what that meant. It meant you live in the place where God rules and reigns. You live in the place God has promised to live among His people, giving them bread and care, love and forgiveness.

Given all that the Promised Land is, given all of that, it would be simply unthinkable for a faithful son of Israel to leave, especially someone named Elimelech, whose very name means "My God is King". You would think that he would remain in the Promised Land, even though there was a famine, and trust that God will see you through the famine. But, that's not what happened. Elimelech loaded up the truck and moved to Moab.

Moab, of all places. You know what that means, right? Moab was outside the Promised Land. It was the place of Gentiles, not God's chosen children. It was a pagan land. In fact, these were the very people who did not even have the decency to give bread and water to the Israelites as they journeyed out of Egypt to the Promised Land. That's the place Elimelech journeyed to and stayed there.

God has given you a place of promise, Dear Child of God. It's this place, right here; a place of beautiful banners and pews. This is the place God rules and reigns in His grace. This is the place God has promised to be found. This is the place God has promised to meet you with His love and care and forgiveness.

But as so often happens, a famine comes your way. A famine, not necessarily a famine of food, but a famine in the form of sickness, depression, the death of a loved one, a fight/quarrel with some you love, a divorce. Something goes wrong. And then comes the time you ask: why is this happening? And you have no idea. It just happened.

Maybe, just maybe, it's a famine of you own making. You've sinned in your thoughts, words, or deeds. You did what was right in your own eyes, and now you have to live with the consequences. You loaded up the truck and sojourned to a place where God does not rule and reign in His grace. A place where God has not promised to meet you with His love and forgiveness and care. You wandered off and now you are alone, like a lost little lamb in the valley shadow of death.

If you think that's the way to go – look at Elimelech. He sojourned to Moab and now he's dead. Is he dead because he sinned against God by leaving the Promised Land and not trusting God to open His hand to satisfy him and Naomi and their two boys? Some say yes, some say no. But, one

thing is for certain – if you sojourn away, if you leave this place where God rules and reigns in His grace; if you leave this place where God has promised to meet you with His love and forgiveness and care, the chances that your faith will die are very, very high. If your faith dies and you die physically with no faith, then you will die for all eternity.

But, Naomi shows you there is no need for that to happen. After her husband died and her boys died, she remained in Moab for about another 10 years. Then, the word came that the Lord had visited His people back home and given them food. At that Good News, Naomi goes home – home to where God has promised to be with His love, and care, and forgiveness. Back to Bethlehem, the House of Bread. She returns.

You can return, as well. You can return because your Father has given you bread, the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ. He is here in this place to give you His love, His care, His forgiveness; to rule and reign as Your King of love.

II. YOUR KING COMES TO YOU. He comes to people in great disaster, in the “famines”, like those 10 lepers. He brings His love and care and forgiveness. He does it by preaching and teaching and His miracles. But chiefly, He does it by taking all of your sins, all your sorrows, and carries them all to Calvary’s cross. He is nailed to that cross and bleeds all over it to take all of your sin and its grief and its sorrow away from you.

III. He rises the 3rd day to call you home again; to say because your sin is gone, there is nothing separating you from your Father in heaven any more. Return to the Lord your God, return to His love and care, forgiveness and blessings. He calls upon you to return. He calls you back, to give you all of His good gifts in your baptism, His Word, and His very own supper. There, in those means of grace, you receive all of His love

and care and forgiveness. And, He keeps you here, Dear Child of God, so that you may remain in Christ Jesus no matter what the famine before you is, receiving His love, and care, and forgiveness.