

Sermon for Morning Prayer
The Sunday Third Before Advent
(Trinity XXV, 2008)

Lessons:

First Lesson: Here beginneth the first Chapter of the Book of Ruth.¹

“Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled, that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehemjudah [**BETH-luh-hem-JOO-duh**] went to sojourn in the country of Moab [**MOE-ab**], he, and his wife, and his two sons. And the name of the man was Elimelech [**Ee-LIM-uh-lek**], and the name of his wife Naomi [**NAY-oh-mee**], and the name of his two sons Mahlon [**MA-lahn**] and Chilion [**KILL-ee-ahn**], Ephrathites [**EFF-ruh-thights**] of Bethlehemjudah [**BETH-luh-hem-JOO-duh**]. And they came into the country of Moab [**MOE-ab**], and continued there. And Elimelech [**Ee-LIM-uh-lek**], Naomi’s [**NAY-oh-meze**] husband died; and she was left, and her two sons. And they took them wives of the women of Moab [**MOE-ab**]; the name of the one was Orpah [**OAR-puh**], and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years. And Mahlon [**MA-lahn**] and Chilion [**KILL-ee-ahn**] died also both of them; and the woman was left of her two sons and her husband.

“Then she arose with her daughters in law, that she might return from the country of Moab [**MOE-ab**]: for she had heard in the country of Moab [**MOE-ab**] how that the Lord had visited his people in giving them bread. Wherefore she went forth out of the place where she was, and her two daughters in law with her; and they went on the way to return unto the land of Judah [**JOO-duh**]. And Naomi [**NAY-oh-mee**] said unto her two daughters in law, Go, return each to her mother’s house: the Lord deal kindly with you, as ye have dealt with the dead, and with me. The Lord grant you that ye may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband. Then she kissed them; and they lifted up their voice, and wept. And they said unto her, Surely we will return with

thee unto thy people. And Naomi [**NAY-oh-mee**] said, Turn again, my daughters: why will ye go with me? are there yet any more sons in my womb, that they may be your husbands? Turn again, my daughters, go your way; for I am too old to have an husband. If I should say, I have hope, if I should have an husband also tonight, and should also bear sons; Would ye tarry for them till they were grown? would ye stay for them from having husbands? nay, my daughters; for it grieveth me much for your sakes that the hand of the Lord is gone out against me. And they lifted up their voice, and wept again: and Orpah [**OAR-puh**] kissed her mother in law; but Ruth clave unto her. And she said, Behold, thy sister in law is gone back unto her people, and unto her gods: return thou after thy sister in law. And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me.”

Here endeth the First Lesson.

Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fifth Verse of the third Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Colossians.

“... Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things’ sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience: In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them. But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; And have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him: Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, cir-

cumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian [**SITH-ee-un**], bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.”

Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the First Lesson: “Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God: Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death part thee and me.”²

In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

Introduction:

From the perspective of Biblical history, Ruth is important because her fidelity to her mother in law led to her marriage with the wealthy Boaz [**BOW-az**]. The great grandson of that marriage was David,³ who became the second King of Israel and was the founder of the royal line from which, pious Jews believed, the Messiah must be born.

Joseph, Jesus’s stepfather, was a descendent of that Davidic line so that, in earthly terms, Jesus fulfilled the prophetic requirements for Messiahship.

Theme:

However, from the perspective of Biblical theology, there is another thread woven through the story of Ruth, the faithful daughter in law. When a person or an event in the Old Testament represents and foreshadows a person or an event in the New Testament, we call that interrelationship

typology. In this relationship of typology, we call the Old Testament person or event the *type* and the New Testament or event it presages we call the *antitype*.

In this sense, Ruth is a *type* of the individual Christian who, immediately following the day of Pentecost, would begin joining the new Christian Church. Therefore, in this same sense, that new Christian, and therefore the entire people of the new Church, and therefore each of us sitting here, are the *antitypes* of Ruth.

Development:

1. **Ruth left the land of her birth, and the tribe into which she had been born, and voluntarily joined the family – and nation – into which she had married.**

In the ancient world, one's place in the scheme of things was normally fixed by the situation of one's birth. By being born into a particular family, one was likewise born into the tribe to which that family belonged and, therefore, into the nation or people of which that tribe was a portion.

Normally, that nation or people occupied a particular territory which had historically been its home. In Ruth's case, and that of her sister in law Orpah [**OAR-puh**], this was Moab [**MOE-ab**], a territory that faced Judah across the Dead Sea. The Moabites [**MOE-uh-bites**] were distant relatives of the Jews, by some thought to be the ones who had not gone down into Egypt with Joseph. When the Hebrews journeyed out of Sinai [**SIGH-nye**] to Canaan [**KAY-nuh-ann**], the Moabites [**MOE-uh-bites**] denied the Hebrews free passage along the King's Highway from Egypt to Damascus where it crossed the Moabite [**MOE-uh-bite**] lands,⁴ which was the traditional explanation for the enmity that often divided the two peoples.

Moabite woman, should remember how fully and faithfully she lived out her commitments, and should remember how God cared for and prospered her for doing so.

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The Rev'd Canon John A. Hollister⁹
November 9, 2008.

¹ *Psalms and Lessons for the Church Year* (1943), THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER x (PECUSA 1928).

² Ruth 1:16-17 (KJV).

³ St. Matthew 1:5-6; Ruth 4:17 & 21-22.

⁴ Judges 11:17-18.

⁵ The concept that on marriage a woman gave up her citizenship of birth and adopted her husband's citizenship, if different from hers, lasted a very long time. It was not removed from American law until after World War I.

⁶ Ruth 1:16.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ St. Matthew 1:5-6; Ruth 4:17 & 21-22.

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dren that Ruth had not had with Chilion [**KILL-ee-ahn**]. God went even a step beyond merely giving Ruth a child; He gave her one who was significant in the history of Israel. That child, Obed [**OH-bedd**], was the grandfather of the great King David,⁸ making Ruth the ancestress of the royal line.

Conclusion:

Ruth is a *type* or foreshadower of both the Blessed Virgin Mary, to whom Christ would be born, and of the Gentiles who would voluntarily join the new Christian Church, the people of God. Ruth is also the *type* of the Christian who, unlike the Jew who had to be born into the Hebrew people, voluntarily joins the New Israel in a personal act of will, by accepting Christ, professing his or her faith, and being baptized.

Ruth's fidelity to her commitments, even after she was legally and morally free of them, was used by God to as a critical event in bringing about the birth of the Messiah and, thus, to show that even foreign peoples such as the Moabites [**MOE-uh-bites**], who were often despised by the Jews, were included in His plan for salvation. Thus Ruth, the central character of the story, as well as the Moabites [**MOE-uh-bites**] themselves, who only occupy the background of the story, are *types* of the non-Jewish peoples who would be evangelized and brought into the Church by the Apostles. Ruth herself, as a mother of the royal Davidic line into which Joseph would be born, is also a *type* of Our Lady, to whom Our Lord would be born.

So the story of Ruth, the faithful daughter in law and stranger to the people of Israel, whom God used to become the great grandmother of King David, is set before us as a model of Christian fidelity. Whenever we ourselves must consider what and how much is demanded of us by our Christian profession, we should remember the humble

Until the time of the Israelites' King David – who was descended from Ruth – the Hebrews and the Moabites [**MOE-uh-bites**] were sometimes allied, sometimes at odds. By the time of Christ, the most prominent family in Palestine was the Herodians [**HAIR-oh-dee-unz**], who as Roman puppets ruled large tracts of the Jews' historic territory but who were originally from Moab [**MOE-ab**]. As foreigners, however, who were not descended in the Davidic [**DAY-vid-ick**] line, these Moabite [**MOE-uh-bite**] Herodians [**HAIR-oh-dee-unz**] were never accepted by the Jews as legitimate rulers, which is why they are shown in the New Testament to have been so touchy about any challenge to their authority.

When Orpah [**OAR-puh**] agreed to marry Mahlon [**MA-lahn**], and Ruth agreed to marry Chilion [**KILL-ee-ahn**], then according to ancient custom, each of them left her family of birth and became a constituent member of her husband's family. In doing so, each became, for the duration of her marriage, a member of her husband's people or nation rather than her nation of birth⁵ and each became obligated, among other things, to respect and serve her husband's mother, Naomi [**NAY-oh-mee**]. "And Ruth said, ... whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people...."⁶

In a similar way, upon baptism the Christian leaves, at least spiritually, this world into which he or she was born and becomes a subject of the Kingdom of Heaven, which is realized, if somewhat imperfectly, in the Church.

2. **Upon her marriage, Ruth gave up the worship of the Moabite [**MOE-uh-bite**] gods and became a worshipper of the Hebrew God, Yahweh [**YAH-way**].**

The Moabites traditionally worshipped the pagan gods Chemosh [**KEY-mosh**] and Baal-peor [**BUH-awl-**

PAY-oar], but that does not seem to have prevented inter-marriages between the Jews of Judah [**JOO-duh**] and the Moabites [**MOE-uh-bites**]. Upon her marriage, and thus her adoption into the Hebrew people, Ruth also adopted the worship of Yahweh, the Hebrews' God: "And Ruth said, ... thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God..."⁷

In a similar way, upon accepting Christ, believing in Him, professing that faith, and joining the Church, the Christian is called to cast off the worship of the gods of this world and to devote himself or herself to the worship of the Triune God. And make no mistake about it: the world around us is filled with pagan deities, all competing for our attention and devotion, although nowadays they are not so often symbolized by statues set up in named temples. Nevertheless, anything that we permit to guide and rule our lives can easily become for us such an alternative god.

3. Upon the deaths of their husbands, Orpah [OAR-puh] and Ruth were released from their commitments to their husbands' family, nation, and God, and were free, if they chose, to return to their own families, nation, and gods.

When Orpah and Ruth's husbands died, their marriages died with them, as did the obligations arising out of those marriages. According to the thinking of that day, the two widows could quite properly have returned to their birth own families and therefore to their nation of birth and to its gods.

Orpah [**OAR-puh**] did just this and the tone of the account makes clear that there was no suggestion of impropriety in her doing this. As Naomi [**NAY-oh-mee**] told her, she was still young enough that in familiar surroundings she might easily find a second husband who would care for her and end her economic insecurity.

Ruth, however, took a sterner and more demanding view than did her sister in law. If both daughters in law had deserted Naomi [**NAY-oh-mee**], then no one would have been left to care for her. Thus Ruth felt called to fulfill this duty of care and support that she had voluntarily undertaken, interpreting that duty broadly in favor of Naomi [**NAY-oh-mee**], even when the narrowest interpretation would have justified her in considering herself released from it.

So Ruth accepted all the uncertainties and hazards of leaving the territory of her birth and traveling to Naomi's [**NAY-oh-meze**] home, where the future for both of them was very uncertain, where they could not be sure of a welcome, where very possibly all of their near kinsfolk were gone or at least forgetful. She risked all this in order to remain faithful to the family obligations she had voluntarily assumed at her marriage. Similarly, we, as Christians, are called to take the most expansive view of the obligations of our vocation of faith, not the narrowest and most convenient one.

4. When Ruth stepped out in faith, facing uncertainty and insecurity, God cared for her, provided for her, and used her in a notable way to accomplish His plan for the Jewish people.

As the remainder of the short Book of Ruth tells us, Ruth's fortitude and fidelity was richly rewarded. Shortly after Naomi [**NAY-oh-mee**] and Ruth arrived in Naomi's [**NAY-oh-meze**] home town, uncertain of whence their next meal might come, Ruth caught the eye of the wealthy but unmarried Boaz [**BOW-az**] who married her and undertook Naomi's [**NAY-oh-meze**] support. Thus Ruth and Naomi's [**NAY-oh-meze**] economic insecurities were eliminated.

One of the misfortunes of Ruth's widowhood was that she and her husband had been childless. By God's providence, however, Ruth and Boaz [**BOW-az**] had the chil-