

**SERMON FOR MORNING PRAYER
THE FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY**

Lessons:¹

The First Lesson: Here beginneth the first Chapter of the Book of Ruth.²

“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 went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons. And the name of the man was Elimelech [**ih-LIMB-uh-leck**],³ and the name of his wife Naomi, and the name of his two sons Mahlon [**MAH-lonn**]⁴ and Chilion [**KILL-ih-onn**],⁵ Ephrathites [**EFF-rah-thights**]⁶ of Bethlehemjudah. And they came into the country of Moab, and continued there. And Elimelech [**ih-LIMB-uh-leck**] Naomi's husband died; and she was left, and her two sons. And they took them wives of the women of Moab; the name of the one was Orpah [**OAR-puh**],⁷ and the name of the other Ruth: and they dwelled there about ten years. And Mahlon [**MAH-lonn**] and Chilion [**KILL-ih-onn**] 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: for she had heard in the country of Moab 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. And Naomi 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 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, Entreat 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.

The Second Lesson: Here beginneth the fifth Verse of the third Chapter of the Epistle of Blessed Paul the Apostle to the Colossians.⁸

“... 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, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian [**SITH-ee-uhn]**,⁹ bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.”

selves as closely as we can upon those who, like Ruth and like the Blessed Virgin Mary, have submitted themselves to Him in faith.

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The Rev'd Canon John A. Hollister²⁴
February 6, 2011.

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

² Ruth 1:1-17 (KJV).

³ Adapted from W. MURRAY SEVERANCE, PRONOUNCING BIBLE NAMES 30 (Holman Bible Publishers, 1985).

⁴ *Ibid.* 53.

⁵ *Ibid.* 26.

⁶ *Ibid.* 32.

⁷ *Ibid.* 61.

⁸ Colossians 3:5-11 (KJV).

⁹ SEVERANCE, *op. cit.* 67.

¹⁰ St. Luke 4:23-24 (RSV).

¹¹ Leviticus 19:9-10.

¹² Ruth 2:8-16.

¹³ Ruth 3:7-14.

¹⁴ Judges 11:14-18.

¹⁵ Numbers 20:14-21.

¹⁶ St. Matthew 2:16-18.

¹⁷ St. Matthew 1:5-6.

¹⁸ St. Matthew 1:16.

¹⁹ "Christ", meaning "the Anointed One" or "Messiah", is a *title*, not a *name*.

²⁰ St. John 4:1-30.

²¹ Acts 8:5-25.

²² Acts 8:27-39.

²³ Acts 10.

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Here endeth the Second Lesson.

Text:

From the First Lesson: "And Ruth said, Entreat 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."¹⁰ In the Name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Ghost. *Amen*.

Homily:

Today's First Lesson is the beginning of the account of how Ruth, a woman of Moab [**MOE-abb**], became incorporated by marriage into a Jewish family. It is tempting to dwell at some length on the little human vignettes [**VINN-yetts**] pepper the story and give it a sort of journalistic immediacy. Among my favorites are the ways that Ruth takes advantage of the Levitical command to allow the poor and needy to glean grain in the corners and edges of the fields,¹¹ that Boaz [**BOW-azz**] finds his eye caught by the pretty woman he sees in his fields,¹² and that way she and Boaz [**BOW-azz**] snuggle together on the threshing floor after the harvest celebration.¹³

All these have great human interest and add much to the artistic verisimilitude of the account, but they are not what makes it significant theologically or morally, which are the things with which sermons are supposed to deal. For those purposes, this bit of history has three essential elements.

The first is its background: the Moabites [**MOE-ah-bytes**] were perhaps related to the Jews but they were a separate people and the two nations' history was a rocky one,

going back as far as the Israelites' journey from Egypt to Canaan [**KEY-nann**],¹⁴ when the Moabites [**MOE-ah-bights**] joined with the Edomites [**EE-dumm-ights**] and the Ammonites [**AMM-un-ights**] in denying the Israelites' request to travel through their lands on the King's Highway that ran along the east bank of the Jordan Valley from the Negev [**NEH-gev**] Desert up to Damascus.¹⁵

The Jews' hostility to the Moabites [**MOE-ah-bytes**] appears by implication in the New Testament, where one of the reasons the Herodians always felt insecure on their thrones was their ethnic background as Idumeans [**idd-oo-MAY-unz**], *i.e.*, as descendants of the Moabites [**MOE-ah-bytes**]. This foreign origin made them, in the eyes of strict Jews, ineligible to be kings in Israel. This was a significant factor in, among other events, Herod's slaughter of the innocents around Bethlehem.¹⁶

This makes all the more important God's choice of Ruth to become an essential link in a critical genealogy, which is the second essential element of this story. For Ruth, by her marriage with Boaz, and the birth of their son Obed, became the great-grandmother of King David,¹⁷ the founder of Israel's royal line. Thus she also became ultimately the ancestress of Joseph,¹⁸ the foster-father of Our Lord Jesus, the Christ,¹⁹ who had to be born into a Davidic family in order to fulfill the Old Testament prophecies regarding the nature of the Messiah.

God's use of a foreign woman, and a member of a race that was at odds with the Hebrews and, by many of them, actually despised, is an important precursor of such New Testament events as Our Lord's colloquy with the Samaritan woman at the well of Sychar²⁰ [**SIGH-karr**], Philip's evangelization of the Samaritans²¹ and of the Treasurer of the Queen of Ethiopia,²² and St. Peter's reception of Cornelius the Centurion and his household,²³ not to mention all of St. Paul's missionary journeys. That is, Ruth's incorpora-

tion into the family that would become that of the Messiah was a sign that the mission of that Messiah, and therefore of His followers, was not merely to the Jews, but was also to the entire world.

The third essential element of this story is how Ruth, as the obedient daughter who fulfilled her duty to her mother-in-law even to the point of leaving her own land and people, and who therefore became in the world's eyes an ancestress of Jesus the Messiah, is a *type*, or Scriptural foreshadowing, of Mary, the woman who submitted in complete obedience to God and so became the mother of that same Jesus the Messiah.

This is one of the primary reasons Christians have always had a great devotion to Mary, who exhibited in the highest degree that self-sacrificing submission to God, and in connection with our veneration of her, we should not forget those other women in the Bible, such as Ruth, who exemplified many of the same qualities.

Conclusion:

So as we contemplate this lovely little account of a lonely but loyal woman, we should remember three things. First, just as God is no respecter of persons, so He is no respecter of peoples, in the sense of nations or ethnic communities. All natural groupings of people are of equal value in His eyes and therefore should be in ours as well.

Second, God is the God of all peoples, not just of those who happened to hear of Him first. Therefore, we should always be working to carry our knowledge of Him to those who have not yet heard of Him, or at least have not had Him presented to them in any particularly persuasive way.

Third, we cannot fulfill our assigned rôles in God's plans for the salvation of all peoples unless we model our-