

Heavenly Father, we bow in your presence. May Your Word be our rule, Your Spirit our teacher and Your greater glory our supreme concern, through Jesus Christ our Lord. AMEN

19th century British novelist, Charles Dickens began his novel A Tale of two cities – a novel set in the time of the French Revolution – with the words,

It was the best of times; it was the worst of times.

Best of times/worst of times – accurate description of this splendid Biblical story we have been considering for the past few weeks.

For this story truly does drag us through the emotions of the best and worst of times.

The story opens with the phrase '**in the days** – a warm, inviting line like Once upon a time.

We want to sink into a comfy chair, ready for a heartwarming, feel good story – *surely the best of times.*

But the next phrase – **when the judges ruled.**

Not good – for the judges ruled in a time of lawlessness – **in those days...all the people did what was right in their own eyes (Judges 21:25)** – *worst of times.*

But the story is set in Bethlehem – a place blessed of the Lord. Bethlehem means House of Bread – a town of satisfaction and contentment – *that is good.* But there is famine – Elimelech and his family are forced to flee to Moab where there is food, but the true God is not worshipped – *good/bad*

Elimelech and his two sons die.

Naomi, his wife is left on her own, having only daughters in law – Orpah and Ruth. *That's bad*

Famine in Judah ends – Naomi decides to head back to Bethlehem – *good*

Ruth makes a true and radical commitment to follow God and to be part of the community of faith with Naomi – *that's good – very, very good indeed.*

Yet, Naomi believes God has abandoned her.

She changes her name to Mara – which means bitter. – *that's bad.*

Ruth and Naomi are widows in Bethlehem without any visible means of support – *that's bad.*

But through the laws of provision by gleaning in the fields, Ruth is able to work in the fields of a wealthy man named Boaz – *that's good.*

Boaz as it turns out is no stranger – but a kinsman of Naomi's late husband Elimilech. This turns out to be a family affair – *this is good.*

Owing to Ruth's loving kindness to Naomi, (hesed), about which Boaz has heard, Ruth comes under Boaz's personal protection as she gleans in the fields – *again good.*

Naomi devises a plan to allow Ruth to tell Boaz of her interest and desire for him in marriage – *that's good.*

Ruth changes the plans forcing Boaz to 'go public' as it were – *good/bad* For the law insists that another

kinsman closer than Boaz has first refusal on Elimilech's property and Ruth

The intrigue continues.

Will this nearer kinsman wish to marry Ruth?

The verses in chapter 4 which Lucas did not read give the details of the scene in the market place where all this must be worked out.

Mr. No Name pulls back from redeeming

Elimilech's land and acquiring Ruth

To show that this is so, Mr. No Name takes off one of his sandals and gives it to Boaz, thereby

confirming that the land and Ruth is now Boaz's.

All the people at the city gate who witness this

exchange affirm this transaction is effectively

signed, sealed and delivered.

So there follows the verses that Lucas read.

The son born to Ruth and Boaz is named

Obed.

And Obed says the narrator has as his future descendant one Jesse, the father of David – King David.

If you can wade through the tongue twisting genealogy of David's descendants – you come to Joseph, husband of Mary and earthly father of Jesus.

So, now you know the rest of the story!

Great story isn't it – and there are sections we have not even begun to reflect upon and consider.

By way of summary, though a great deal separates us in time and space from the time when the judges ruled, what can we say in general about the Book of Ruth's touch to our lives?

Every son or daughter of God – you, me, all of us, any of us *are like Ruth in that we too live lives full of twists, turns and switchbacks*

Good and not so good stuff.

Being a believer,

Following Jesus neither isolates nor insulates us from the best of times or the worst of times.

Ruth's story clearly illustrates this truth!

But so does every story in scripture and every biography or autobiography written about or by the faithful.

And so do our stories

Too many people even yet hold to the assumption that if they believe in Jesus firmly and trust and

obey him, life will have no more tears, pain, and suffering.

NOT SO!

The Bible never claims that!

It claims that God will be there, with us in the troubles – NOT that the troubles will just disappear or that there will not be hard and difficult times.

Life is at times very difficult!

The promise is that as believers we need not think we 'go it' all by ourselves.

God's promises are that He is with

The presence of the risen Christ is with us

The counsel and help of the Holy Spirit are with us – ALWAYS.

Ruth's story also calls us *pay greater attention to what can best be described as 'signposts of grace' in our lives.*

Those circumstances, people, overall sense of God's timing – Kairos – we know are there, as we look behind us.

Reflecting, praying about, preaching upon some incidents in the story of Ruth, I am reminded this time in greater clarity that Ruth's story has retained its eternal immediacy and appeal, because Ruth's story helps us truth in God's grace, *even when the clouds in our lives are so thick we cannot see the road ahead, let alone the signs on the side.*

Through Ruth's story we see evidence of the providence of God

When Naomi's whole life seemed to cave in while in Moab, God gives Ruth to Naomi.

Gleaning in the field of Boaz – accidental – I think not

Naomi's plan to fix up Boaz and Ruth (last week's story) changed by Ruth

simple scheming

Birth of Obed – the 'story' is able to continue. JUST the birth of A baby?

Not really – more about that in a moment

A truth I learned late, but not too late in parish ministry and even yet need gentle reminders – God can use unexpected people and unlikely means to accomplish his good purposes in each of our lives.

God does not always go about fulfilling his good purposes for us in the way we might imagine.

You never know who it is that God will use

And more often than not, it is exactly the kind of person you wouldn't think he would use that God in fact uses.

I find that most encouraging and humbling.

Encouraging because the work of the Lord is not all dependent on me and how I view things

Humbling, because it means none of us is the

ultimate font of all wisdom

Every one of us is fallible, dependent upon God and

more often than not, truly "needy of his love"

people.

Ruth's story is also an important reminder of our interconnectedness as human beings with generations past.

We are not alone—God is with us

So, if we hold to belief in the communion of the saints—that great stadium of the faithful now with Jesus cheering us on as described so evocatively by the author of the letter to the Hebrews,

12 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely,^[a] and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us,² looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of^[b] the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebs. 12:1-2)

We realize that we are not all by ourselves. We are a part of something huge and never-ending.

This I believe is one purpose for including the small genealogy to close the book of Ruth. It is to remind readers that they are part of something larger than the immediate.

I have a Presbytery colleague who has traced his family history back to the early 1400's in what is now Germany. He has had the history printed with pictures, maps and the like. It is quite impressive –compared to what many have assembled about their own family genealogy. I have file folders that can trace my mother's family back to the American Revolution where the family

crossed into Canada –Niagara specifically because they wanted no part of this new government of the United States – it earned them the distinction of what history know as United Empire Loyalists. – U.E.L. – big think in areas in Ontario and the Maritimes.

On my Dad's side, I can easily go back to my great grandfather who came to Canada as a British regular in the 1860's over British fear of the Trent affair...

It's not as comprehensive a family tree as my colleague's, but it is important to me, as his family history is to him. It gives to each of us place and a sense of history. It anchors us in the senses of a developing story.

My colleague and I, and all of us who are followers of Jesus are a significant player in another genealogy that gives us place and connects us with the generations of the faithful.

Affirms we are on an historic continuum with the covenant people of God.

We are not all by ourselves.

We have spiritual ancestors.

We are spiritually tied to the history of Ruth and Boaz – a descendent of their son, Obed.

Say what?

One of Obed's descendants is Jesse; Jesse is the father of David,

Read through that genealogy found in the opening verses of Matthew and you come to the last few sentences.

Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary of whom Jesus was born, who is called the Messiah.

Big picture, big story!

One of the great diseases of our day is triviality.

And although the Internet has in so many ways become a great tool and benefit, I believe it also

contributes hugely to this sense of triviality all

around us,

The Internet beguiles us into spending time – a lot of time on things that are utterly trivial.

What makes this a disease is that we who are created in the image of God are meant to live for magnificent causes – advancement of the Kingdom of God, being an active participant in this advancement.

Whether we care to admit it or not, our souls will never be ultimately satisfied with trifles! Or the trivial pursuits of this world

Through this interconnectedness with Ruth, God wants us to know that when we follow Him, our lives always mean more than we think they do. For God's people, there is always a connection between the ordinary events of life and how God uses them in history

As spiritual descendants of the Risen Lord then, everything we do in obedience to God, no matter how small, is significant!

Serving widowed mother in law,
Gleaning in a field
Falling in love,
Having a baby – for God's people these things are connected to eternity.
They are part of something so much bigger than they seem.

The call as we wind up these weeks with Ruth is to remember above all that the God who called Ruth is the God who calls us in Jesus Christ.

The challenge--How shall each of us respond to this
call, not only today, but tomorrow, and the day
after and the day after that and so on...?