

## ***St. Elizabeth's Episcopal Church, Whiterocks***

Dear St. Elizabeth's Family,

November 6, 2021

Naomi and her family were refugees. Famine had struck the Promised Land, and people were starving. There was no choice but to leave home in order to survive, so they traveled to the land of Moab. Her husband and their two sons were hard workers, and they made just enough to get by.

That's become a familiar story, hasn't it? Famine drove many Europeans to leave their home countries for North America, and now people from Central America are heading north across the desert, desperately seeking work. Tragically, it was also the fate of many Native people, forcibly removed from their homelands and then abandoned by broken treaties and heartless officials.

It doesn't take much to turn a life of bare survival into desperation. When Naomi's husband died, her sons continued to work and care for her. As time went on, they found Moabite wives, marrying Orpah and Ruth. They were still living on the edge, but the family was holding together.

The Bible doesn't tell us exactly how disaster struck, but it did. Both of Naomi's sons died, leaving her helpless in a man's world, with no protector or breadwinner. Tearfully, she hugged her daughters-in-law and sent them back to their birth families. Helpless and alone, Naomi prepared to face her desolate future. "Call me no longer 'the pleasant one' (the meaning of her name in Hebrew); call me Mara (bitter), for the Lord has dealt bitterly with me." (*Ruth 1:20*)

Orpah departed in tears, but Ruth refused to walk away. You might say that, as it is in the Indian way, Naomi had become a mother to her, and Ruth couldn't leave a beloved elder helpless. In that instant she chose to leave her community and culture behind, risking her own safety to accompany Naomi on the journey back to the land of her birth. "Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God."

The world in those days held many perils for women on their own, away from the protection of family. A young widow like Ruth would have attracted unwanted attention, so they hurried to Naomi's homeland, finding secluded places to sleep and receiving food from women along the way.

Fortune smiled upon them when they arrived in Bethlehem: the barley harvest was just beginning. The townspeople recognized Naomi, though she was so changed that they wondered at first. Ruth boldly joined the young women who followed the harvesters, gleaning the remaining grain, and she came to a field belonging to Boaz, a close kinsman of Naomi's late husband. When he discovered the connection, he welcomed Ruth to the gleaning and ordered the young men not to "bother" her.

It was clear to Boaz that Ruth had made great sacrifices, leaving all she knew to accompany Naomi. He began to show favor to her: making sure she had enough to eat and drink as she worked, sending grain with her at the end of the day. Naomi offered a blessing for Boaz, proclaiming that "the Lord's kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead." (*2:20*) She also realized that, with the end of the harvest drawing near, it was time to act boldly to renew the family bonds.

"My daughter," she said to Ruth, "I need to seek some security for you, so that it may be well with you." She told Ruth to "wash and anoint yourself, and put on your best clothes, and go down to the threshing floor," where she would find Boaz. (*3:3*) We might think of this as "nature taking its course," but the wise elder saw the hand of the Lord at work.

Ruth and Boaz married and became the parents of Obed, grandparents of Jesse, and great-grandparents of the illustrious King David. Ruth, a refugee who left the community of her birth to accompany an elder with nothing in the world. Ruth, who boldly joined strangers at harvest time, only to find a home for herself and Naomi. Ruth, a foreigner whose life was transformed by the hand of the Lord, claiming a unique place in the lineage of David and Jesus.

Michael+

## ***Gathering in Our Hearts***

### **Prayer for the Renewal of Life**

O God, the King eternal, whose light divides the day from the night and turns the shadow of death into the morning: Drive far from us all wrong desires, incline our hearts to keep your law, and guide our feet into the way of peace; that, having done your will with cheerfulness during the day, we may, when night comes, rejoice to give you thanks; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

### **The Song of Mary** (*Message translation*)

I'm bursting with God-news; I'm dancing the song of my Savior God.

God took one good look at me, and look what happened—

I'm the most fortunate woman on earth!

What God has done for me will never be forgotten,

the God whose very name is holy, set apart from all others.

His mercy flows in wave after wave on those who are in awe before him.

He bared his arm and showed his strength, scattered the bluffing braggarts.

He knocked tyrants off their high horses, pulled victims out of the mud.

The starving poor sat down to a banquet; the callous rich were left out in the cold.

He embraced his chosen child, Israel; he remembered and piled on the mercies, piled them high.

It's exactly what he promised, beginning with Abraham and right up to now.

### **Reflection**

Help me search for the heart that feels alone. It may belong to a child or an elder. It may be a person poor or privileged. It may be someone from any faith, culture or race. It doesn't matter because feeling alone erases all distinctions. Being alone is a world within itself, one that many of us gladly seek out because we find it a healing place. But for others it may be just the opposite: a sense of isolation that is painful to the soul. Help me search for that person, for the one suffering from feeling cut off or abandoned. Let us send out lifelines of hope to those who feel alone. Let us fill empty places with as much love as we can. *Episcopal Bishop Steven Charleston, Choctaw nation*

**Remember** those among us who are in need of prayer. We give thanks for the changing seasons and pray for all who are cold or hungry. In our church family, we remember Lucille, Nicolette, Daisy, Amanda, Julia, Arick, Leo, SueAnn, Dave & Nora, Rodricka, Ina Jane, Peggy and Reuban, and those who have died, especially Greg Quinn. We pray for first responders and medical workers, those from our reservation serving in the Armed Forces and for all veterans. We say the **Lord's Prayer** out loud.

### **Blessing**

Keep me, O Christ, in a love that is tender,

Keep me, O Christ, in a love that is true,

Keep me, O Christ, in a love that is strong,

Today, tonight, and always. *John Philip Newell*

***If you can, join us for in-person worship at St. Elizabeth's on Sundays at 10:00 am.***

***You can also look for prayers and a spiritual message on Michael Carney's Facebook page.***