

## Introduction

*You've Got to be Carefully Taught*

Check-in &amp; Introductions

## Old Testament Lesson

Ruth 1:1, 3-8, 14-18 (NRSVUE)

<sup>1</sup> In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and two sons.

<sup>3</sup> But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. <sup>4</sup> These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. When they had lived there about ten years, <sup>5</sup> both Mahlon and Chilion also died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband. <sup>6</sup> Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD had considered his people and given them food. <sup>7</sup> So she set out from the place where she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to go back to the land of Judah. <sup>8</sup> But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back each of you to your mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me.

<sup>14</sup> Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.

<sup>15</sup> So she said, "Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." <sup>16</sup> But Ruth said,

"Do not press me to leave you,  
to turn back from following you!

Where you go, I will go;  
where you lodge, I will lodge;  
your people shall be my people  
and your God my God.

<sup>17</sup> Where you die, I will die,  
and there will I be buried.

May the LORD do thus to me,  
and more as well,

if even death parts me from you!"

<sup>18</sup> When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

## Bible/Sermon Focus

The book of Ruth takes place "during the time of the Judges." This was the period after the people of God had been freed from Egypt and wandered in the wilderness, but before the rise of the kings in the Old Testament. That places the story of Ruth in Bethlehem and Moab sometime in the 11th Century BCE. However, a majority of scholars believe that the book of Ruth was written down sometime between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, hundreds of years later, causing some scholars to question the authenticity of the story. But whether the story of Ruth is factual or not, there is a question that is perhaps more important: Why did this story get written down when it did? Why, sometime between the 6<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE, did the people of God

need to read *this* story?

Before the exile which forcefully dispersed the Jewish people across many nations, the purity codes of the people were much tighter when it came to dating foreigners. Children born of foreigners were not considered part of the “assembly” or “tribe.” Some foreigners were considered worse than others—the Moabites being one of them. Deuteronomy 23:3 states, “No Ammonite or Moabite shall come into the assembly of the Lord even to the tenth generation.” That’s harsh.

But, during and after the exile the people of God were more exposed to people of different nations. They began forming bonds and building lives outside of their homeland, which had also become more diverse because of the military occupation of neighboring nations. On top of that, it was during the exile that the Jewish people really became monotheistic.

Before exile, the people believed that their God, Yahweh, was superior to the gods of other nations. During exile, they stopped believing in those other gods—allowing room for *the* one God, to be not only the creator, but also the keeper and sustainer of all people.

Both the rise of monotheism and the mingling of people from different nations posed a question to the Jewish people: Is it okay to marry outsiders? It was while *that* question was being asked that the story of Ruth was written down. The Old Testament does not actually answer this question in a clear way. Instead, it offers differing opinions from the same time period. Some people believed God was moving them more toward growing the diversity of their nation, and some people believed God wanted things to stay the same or even revert back to a time when things seemed better for the people, the days when Israel was *great* among the nations.

In this regard, scholars believe that the book of Ruth was one that argued for the admittance of foreigners into the assembly by lifting Ruth, a Moabite, into the status of being the great grandmother David, Israel’s most favored king.

There are cultural complexities found in the Book of Ruth that mirror those we see in the musical *South Pacific*. As the show confronts racism and nationalism, we see themes that are still true of our own issues today. Learning to love or to hate people that are different than us is a story and a reality that is as old as we have been around. *South Pacific*, like some of the Old Testament writers, affirms the idea that mistrust of people that are different than us is taught and can be unlearned. We are not born racist or nationalist, and God does not prefer one group of people over another. The story of *South Pacific* is set in 1943. The musical was produced in 1949, and in 1948, President Harry Truman issued Executive Order 9981, which officially ended segregation in the military.

Our stories, whether historical fiction or factual, speak into the realities that we are living. Both *Ruth* and *South Pacific* acknowledge the complexities of our ability to “other” one another, and our calling to learn to love each other more and more as God has called us to do.

*South Pacific* contains a song that was deeply controversial at its time of production. People around Rodgers and Hammerstein suggested they cut the song from the show claiming it was

"not pleasant," and too preachy and political. The song prompted Georgia lawmakers to propose a bill that banned any entertainment that featured "an underlying philosophy inspired by Moscow." Their statement specifically referred to the song "Carefully Taught," as they considered the affirmation of interracial marriage to be un-American.

*You've got to be taught  
To hate and fear,  
You've got to be taught  
From year to year,  
It's got to be drummed  
In your dear little ear  
You've got to be carefully taught.*

*You've got to be taught to be afraid  
Of people whose eyes are oddly made,  
And people whose skin is a diff'rent shade,  
You've got to be carefully taught.*

*You've got to be taught before it's too late,  
Before you are six or seven or eight,  
To hate all the people your relatives hate,  
You've got to be carefully taught!*

The beautiful thing is, if we can work through our assumptions about others, we may find some of the most meaningful bonds of our lives, within relationships with people we never thought possible. We may find that the Spirit has made family where no family was before. Something beautiful that happens in both South Pacific and the story of Ruth. We can unlearn. We can let go. With the Holy Spirit working between us, God can weave us together in ways that offer love and hope to each of us, and redemption for generations to come.

## Discussion Questions

- 1.) Reflect on this quote from Robin DiAngelo, "If I believe that only bad people are racist, I will feel hurt, offended, and shamed when an unaware racist assumption of mine is pointed out. If I instead believe that having racist assumptions is inevitable (but possible to change), I will feel gratitude when an unaware racist assumption is pointed out; now I am aware of and can change that assumption."
- 2.) How do you see Manchester UMC living into God's call for us to welcome people different than us? Where have you formed bonds in unexpected places?
- 3.) Share your thoughts on what you read about the book of Ruth. Did you learn anything new?
- 4.) What were you carefully taught? What were your parents carefully taught? What were your grandparents carefully taught?
- 5.) It may feel easy to dismiss the people of God for wanting to keep older viewpoints alive. Discuss the value of holding onto tradition. Discuss the value of change.

## Prayer

Holy Spirit, you make family where we thought no family was possible. You bring new people and ideas into our lives and you challenge us until we find your love at the center of it all. God, be with us in our assumptions, help us see the hurt we cause with humbleness and grace. Help us extend that grace to others. Mold us to be the community you wish for us. Amen.

*“These women are not all in the same lineage if you count by blood and marriage. But they are woven together in a spiritual family, a family into which we have been adopted and woven. There is more than one way to make a family. Like them, many of us have spiritual families and families of the heart in addition to families of blood and marriage. For some, families of choice are closer and safer circles of love and nurture. Love and lineage do not always go together.” - Rev. Dr. Wil Gafney*