

B Lectionary 32 11.10.24
Ruth 3:1-5, 4:13-17
Focus Statement: God calls us to love.

Friends in Christ, I have a confession to make to you. At some point on Tuesday, well before any of the results started coming in, I realized I wanted my chosen candidates to win because I wanted the other side to be upset. That revelation has forced me to face some hard truths about myself. I wrote my Trumpet article this week about my concerns about the vitriol of this election cycle, but I hadn't realized until Tuesday how much it was changing me, and I don't like who I've become.

Who our elected officials are will not solve the divisiveness we are facing. Today half of the country is elated, half devastated, and all think the other side is wrong in their feelings. Per a recent poll taken by John Hopkins University, nearly half the country, across both parties, thinks the members of the other party are not just wrong for politics but are downright evil. And no one who sits in the White House is going to be able to solve that problem for us, that is work that each of us has to do ourselves.

The good news is, to paraphrase the immortal words of Maya Angelou, now that I know better, I can do better. Now that I realize I am as much of a part of the problem, I can start to be part of the solution. The election is over, now the real work begins because, as I quoted Bishop Eaton in my newsletter article this month, "We are not defined by our political affiliations but by our shared baptism and our commitment to the Gospel. As people of faith, we are called to engage in our communities and work for justice and to

advocate for the dignity and well-being of all people.” And that is a call that began when the voice of God first moved over the waters and will last until Christ comes again. It is not Democrat work or Republican work, Green Party or Natural Law Party or American Workers Party work. It is our work as children of God and siblings in Christ.

But wait Pastor Kjersten, I’m sure you’re thinking, what can I do? Or, what more can I do, maybe more likely. I mean, we already do so much. We share space with Co-op, we volunteer at the Frankling Food Pantry, at St. Pete’s Pantry, we walk in the CROP Walk, we do God’s Work Our Hands, Tree of Wishes, table at Pridefest, pass out freeze pops, sing in the choir or, just as important, listen to the choir so they have someone to sing to, try to maintain this building for all the groups that use it, provide hospitality for election workers and voters, support each other in joy and sadness, for such a small number of us, we are busy. And now I’m telling you we’re supposed to solve the problems of a divided nation too. What more should we be trying that hasn’t already been tried? Well, there are two women in Jesus’ genealogy that may provide a model for us. Let’s take a look at Ruth and Naomi.

We missed last week’s reading, so let me catch us up. This is the story of the family of a man named Elimelech, who moved with his wife, Naomi, and their two sons from Bethlehem to the country of Moab to escape a famine. While they were living in Moab, life happened. Elimelech died, leaving Naomi a widow raising two boys. The boys met and married nice Moabite women. But then tragedy struck Naomi again as both her sons died, leaving her and her daughters-in-law helpless without a man to be the head of their household. With nowhere else to turn, Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem. She told her

daughters-in-law to return to their families, where they may have hope of remarrying. At first, both refused. But finally, after much urging, one of the two left and returned to her people. But Ruth, in a beautiful declaration of loyalty, refused. At last Naomi relented and the two women traveled together to Bethlehem.

When they reached Bethlehem Ruth went to work gleaning in the fields. Gleaning was an ancient practice where women without other means of support would follow along after the workers had harvested a field and take what was left over. In Israel, farmers had a biblical mandate to leave some crops behind in the field for these women, so that even the landless would have access to food. By chance, Ruth ended up in the field of a man named Boaz. Boaz clearly took a liking to Ruth, telling his workers to keep an eye on her and make sure she ended up gleaning from fields where her work would be successful. When Ruth returned home and told Naomi about the nice man who's fields she'd worked in, Naomi got an idea. See Boaz wasn't just a kind man, he was a relative. Which meant Boaz had an obligation from his relation to Elimelech, to care for Elimelech's widowed wife and daughter-in-law. But, as we'll later find out, there was another closer kinsman. So Boaz could have foisted the women off on another, made them someone else's problem.

Whether Naomi knew of the other man or not, she knew Boaz and saw her opportunity. So, as we read this morning, she instructed Ruth to get dressed up and once Boaz was asleep, to sneak in and lay at his feet. This, for so many reasons, is a super bold move, for Naomi to suggest and for Ruth to agree to. So much could have gone horribly, tragically wrong with this suggestion, the most benign of which could simply have been Boaz rejecting Ruth's

advances. But Naomi knew Boaz, knew his heart, knew the kind of man he was. And the gamble paid off. Ruth and Boaz were married, and they had a son, and that son became the father of Jesse, the father of King David, and eventually, down the line, ancestor to Joseph, stepfather to Jesus.

Ruth is an interesting book of the Bible because, like Esther, God doesn't show up in it.

When the bottom drops out on Naomi's life, and she was left head of an all-widow household, she didn't pray for guidance, she packed herself up and headed home. When it dropped out of Ruth's she committed herself to another and followed Naomi to a foreign land. Once in Bethlehem, Ruth got to work gleaning, and Naomi to scheming a solution to bring them both, but especially Ruth, the security of a home and a place to belong in this strange country. They leap, to Bethlehem, to Boaz's field, to Boaz's feet, trusting that in the gamble God is already there preparing a place for them. And God, through Boaz is and does.

Naomi and Ruth didn't pray for God's help, they acted and trusted that God would work through their actions. This feels to me like such a tremendous act of faith. Teresa and I joke all the time, this is not how I like to move through the world. I like to think and plan and pray and ponder, to ask God for every step and detail along the way so that I will know exactly what I am supposed to do and not make any wrong steps. Which, I confess to you as well my friends, is a good way to get nothing done. Now, here me out, I'm certainly not saying prayer doesn't matter. I'm going to have Linda lead us in prayer in just a few minutes, I one-hundred percent think prayer matters. I just don't see prayer as God letting us off the hook for being God's people in the world. In this time between Christ is risen and

Christ will come again, we who have been washed in the waters of baptism, who weekly take in Christ's body and blood, are the possessors of Christ's hands and feet and voice in the world, and we cannot pray that God will do the work for us, that's not why God gave us hands and feet and voices.

Hands and feet and voices, to reach out and to walk and to speak out for justice. But God also gave us ears. I think that could be the other risk of prayer. We get used to talking and forget to listen. To God, yes, but also to each other. To listen beyond the noise to what is driving it. What is the fear, the hurt, the turmoil behind the volume?

Dear people of God, in the wake of this week's election, now is not the time to gloat or to mourn. Neither despair nor elation will mend broken relationships, comfort the hurting, lift up the downtrodden, heal our broken ecosystem, or calm the drumbeats of war and division. Now is the time to listen, to learn, and, most importantly to act in love. To practice grace, forgiveness, and understanding. To try to see another's perspective, even when you don't agree, and to give each other the benefit of the doubt. Ruth loved Naomi, Naomi loved Ruth, they both trusted Boaz, Boaz loved them, and through this, God worked. May we too have the courage to take bold steps in love. Thanks be to God. Amen.