

Today, we'll hear the story of Moabite woman Ruth, another story from the time of Judges right before Israel was ruled by kings. This story was set in a male-dominated culture. Honestly, it would not be an exaggeration to say that the Ancient Near Eastern world could be downright misogynistic. Sons were seen as blessings and daughters as burdens. Women were often put down, held back, abused, and oppressed. But against that ugly backdrop that devalued and degraded women, God rested the hope of the whole world on two women: Naomi and Ruth, not just a woman but a foreign woman. Today we will hear the story of Ruth, a Moabite woman.

The Moabites were a tribe descended from Moab, the son of Abraham's nephew Lot, born of an incestuous relationship with his oldest daughter (Genesis 19:37). After Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed, and Lot's wife became a pillar of salt, his two daughters made him drunk and slept with him without his knowledge. The son born of Lot's oldest daughter was Moab, whose descendants became the Moabites. The Moabites were historically regarded as the perpetual enemy of the Israelites, "God's Chosen People."

Here is a brief story about a Moabite woman Ruth. Naomi and her husband, with their two sons, moved to Moab from Bethlehem because of a severe famine in the land. Ruth is a Moabite woman married to one of Naomi's sons when Naomi became a widow in the land of Moab. About ten years later, both Naomi's sons died. This left Naomi with her two Moabite daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth. Orpah returned to her parents, but Ruth determined to stay with Naomi as they journey to Bethlehem.

Ruth eventually married Boaz, the kinsman-redeemer, a relative of Naomi on her husband's side. As outlined in the Mosaic Law, he acted upon his duty to redeem an impoverished relative from her circumstances (Leviticus 25:47-49). Ruth bears a son, Obed, who becomes the grandfather of King David and the ancestor of Jesus.

Ruth, a foreign woman, is brought into the privileged lineage of Christ by faith. Her faith is shown in Ruth 1:16 when she replied to Naomi when asked to go back to her people and her god. Ruth replied to Naomi, "Don't urge me to leave you or

to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God" (Ruth 1:16).

This was a very brave, outspoken confession of faith. Please notice that this confession was made by a woman, a young woman, a poor woman, a widow, and a foreigner. Remembering all that, we could think there is no condition of gentleness, obscurity, poverty, or sorrow, which should prevent anybody from making an open confession of allegiance to God when faith in the Lord Jesus Christ has been exercised. If that is your experience, then whoever you may be, you will find an opportunity, somewhere or other, of declaring that you are on the Lord's side.

All members of Kona United Methodist Church had made their confession of faith when they joined the church as a member. By joining our church, each member has declared that he is God's; she is God's.

During this stewardship month of September at Kona United Methodist Church, all members of our church are invited to review and adjust our lifestyle based on our faith in Jesus Christ and uphold our church with prayers, presence, gifts, service, and witness as followers of Jesus Christ faithfully and joyfully.

At Kona, all people—Samoan, Tongan, Asian, White, Black, Hispanic, young, old, straight or gay, whoever it is—are to confess their faith in Jesus Christ openly at least once when they joined the church. It is so much good for once, at least, to say right out straight, "I am a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, and I am not ashamed of it." I do not think we shall ever deviate from our custom. This is the custom at Kona United Methodist Church.

I have also noticed that when people have once confessed Christ before others, they are very apt to do it again somewhere else. Thus, they acquire a kind of boldness and outspokenness upon religious matters and a holy courage as followers of Jesus Christ, which more than make up for any self-denial and trembling that the effort may have cost them.

I think Naomi was quite right to drive Ruth, as it were, to take this brave stand, in which it became an absolute necessity for her to speak right straight out, and say, in the words of our text, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God" (Ruth 1:16).

What is there for any of us to be ashamed of in acknowledging that we belong to the Lord Jesus Christ? What can there be that should cause us to be ashamed of Jesus? I believe that we ought to be ashamed of being ashamed of Jesus; we ought to be afraid of being afraid to own Him; we ought to tremble at trembling to confess Him, and to resolve that we will take all suitable opportunities that we can find of saying, first to our spouse, significant others, our children, grandchildren, relatives, and then to all others with whom we come into contact, "We serve the Lord Jesus Christ."

I believe that Naomi was greatly cheered by hearing this faith declaration from Ruth, especially the last part of it: "Your people will be my people and your God my God." Naomi had suffered a great loss; she had lost her husband and her two sons; but now she had found the soul of her daughter-in-law; and I believe that, according to the scales of true judgment, there ought to have been more joy in her heart at the conversion of Ruth's soul than grief over the death of her husband and her sons.

Our Lord Jesus has told us that "there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repented" (Luke 15:10); and I always understand, by that expression, that there is joy in the heart of God Himself over every sinner's repentance and restoration of their relationship with God. What matters the most in our relationship with God is our faith, not our social status, race, or sexuality.

Let us not be ashamed of who we are and whose we are. Let us not be ashamed of our Lord Jesus Christ in all circumstances. Let us not be ashamed of the Good News of Jesus Christ we have. Let us share God's stories we know and the blessings we have received from the Lord boldly for the sake of God's glory today. Amen.