

The Faith of a Foreign Woman

Ruth 1:16-22

Dec. 6, 2015

Naomi immigrated to Moab with his husband and two sons. Her family did it for the better life. But the Story tells us that she sadly lost everything. Her husband died and her two son also died at their young age. What a tragic life she had. It was something she did not expect. Hurts and pains. Future appeared dark and uncertain. So, being told something good was going on back home, she decided to return Bethlehem.

Before heading back home to Bethlehem, Naomi told her two daughters-in-law not to follow her and asked them to find a new life in their hometown. But Ruth, one of her daughter-in-law insisted to follow her to Bethlehem, saying,

“Where you go, I go; and where you live, I’ll live. Your people are my people, your God is my god; where you die, I’ll die, and that’s where I’ll be buried, so help me God—not even death itself is going to come between us!” She was persistent, so persistent that Naomi let her join her.

We can picture easily how tough and how poor these two widows’ living must have been in the male-dominant society.

When they arrived in Bethlehem the whole town was soon buzzing: “Is this really our Naomi? And after all this time!” But she said, “Don’t call me Naomi; call me Mara, which means Bitter. God has dealt me a bitter blow. I left here full of life, and God has brought me back with nothing but the clothes on my back. Why would you call me Naomi? God certainly doesn’t. God ruined me.”

We understand her bitterness and disappointment. She must have raised questions, “Why me? Why this tragic living? Why? What did I do wrong for this agony? God is punishing me? If not punishing, is God listening to my request and cry? Aren’t these question ours, too?”

Do you feel hopeless and feel so discouraged? Sometime I feel marginalized or ostracized or discriminated? No one seems to take you important? Nothing seems to work the way I’d like? Naomi’s story is our story.

Back to their story, we find something interesting. Making a long story short, their life turned to a new direction when Ruth got married to Boaz, one of the Naomi’s close relatives.

More interesting discovered from the story is that Ruth got a boy, Obed and Obed’s grandson was King David. Ruth became David’s

great grandmother. And after the 28th generation later, Jesus, the Savior was born. Ruth was included in the Jesus' genealogy.

In the lower story, Naomi and Ruth seem to have a just tough life to get along. But in the upper story, God cared for them and led them and included them in God's grand salvation story. There seemed nothing special going in their journey. But God led them and lifted them up for God's awesome plan for salvation.

Sometime, we sense deserted and out of God's caring boundary, particularly when nothing moves to the way I would like. Don't we? One thing after another.

But the story shows God's leading and guiding hands are with us no matter what and no matter what situations we are in. Yes, we wait patiently for God, trusting that God provides all things we need at the right time and at the right place and makes all things for good.

"Footprint" is a great reminder of God and God's care.

One night I dreamed a dream. I was walking along the beach with my Lord. Across the dark sky flashed scenes from my life. For each scene, I noticed two sets of footprints in the sand, one belonging to me and one to my Lord. When the last scene of my life shot before me I looked back at the footprints in the sand. There was only one

set of footprints. I realized that this was at the lowest and saddest times of my life. This always bothered me and I questioned the Lord about my dilemma.

"Lord, You told me when I decided to follow You, You would walk and talk with me all the way. But I'm aware that during the most troublesome times of my life there is only one set of footprints. I just don't understand why, when I need You most, You leave me." He whispered, "My precious child, I love you and will never leave you, never, ever, during your trials and testings. When you saw only one set of footprints, It was then that I carried you."

There was a couple, husband and wife both of whom have Down-syndrome in Norwalk, CT. One with Down-syndrome usually lives alone. But this couple lived together for many years. Many wanted to know how they managed their marriage life.

They were invited to a conference one day. The facilitator asked them, "So how do you guys manage daily chores? Who do cooking?" Ann, wife jumped right in, saying, "I do." "How about dishwashing?" "I do" Anne replied with no hesitation. And she said, "I do laundry, too. I do shopping. I do cleaning, too." So the facilitator asked Anne, "Then, what does Jim do?" After a rather long silence, Anne answered, "He loves me. That is what he does."

What does God do when I hit the rock bottom? What does God do when I suffer? What does God do when I don't see any hope? God loves you. God carries us. So we wait patiently for God, trusting that God will make all things for good, in spite of and through our pains and hurts. Amen.

How was God extended God's grace to Naomi and Ruth who went through tough times? What does the Story tell us? Meeting Boaz changed their life and its direction. Encountering Boaz was God's grace revealed to Naomi and Ruth. God led them to encounter Boaz.

God sends people to our life. God leads us to meet people. God creates relationship in our faith journey. And God extends God's caring love to you and me through all the relationship we have.

Last week I received a card from Barbara Bacarella, who moved to California about several years ago. Let me read it. "Dear Kun Sam, I am thinking of you and want you to know how much you have influenced me. It was wonderful that you had time in Europe to reflect and renew. What I hope you were able to accept is the enormous power of your ministry.

I have not attended a church here in California where I have not thought of the beautiful service in Fairfield, its serene feeling and

the presence of God that you bring through your grace and message.” Dated on Nov. 25th.

Her words came to me as God’s reassuring and encouraging words. Last two months, I was somewhat depressed and struggling. So much to do. So powerless I am.

Frustration and discouragement kept coming to me. “Am I an effective pastor serving here at Fairfield? Am I doing faithfully what I have been called to do?”

Her encouraging letter arrived at the right time and gave me assurance and strength I need when I need them most.

I believe we are not here accidentally. God has led us to meet and do build the Body of Christ and proclaim the Good News to the world. Your presence and partnership in ministry with me is surely a God’s assurance to my life and ministry.

The Gladstone family joined Fairfield grace family this morning. I met them on my first Sunday at Fairfield Grace, July 2008. We sat and had meal together at a table in the Fellowship Hall.

More than 7 years later, here Jason got baptized and he and his family have joined me and you for the ministry and mission of the church. Hallelujah! God is good all the time.

God's beautiful and awesome work begins with our unexpected encountering and growing relationship. So we don't take each one of the relationship for granted, including at home and at work. Because each relationship may bring God's message we need to hear and God's grace we need to welcome.

Are you aching? Are you struggling? Are you facing tough times lately? When things don't turn out the way we plan and expect, we can become frustrated and scared.

But if we devote ourselves to living faithfully, acknowledging that God is with us, we will be lifted and strengthened. God's care for us is real and everlasting in any circumstances life brings.

So we keep waiting patiently for God who make all things for good. While waiting, we keep welcoming and cherishing all the relationship God brings to life, either briefly or for a long time, as God's extended grace and care.

Amen. Amen. Amen.