Text: Ruth 1:1-19

**Introduction**

Have any of you guys seen the various versions of the “the mid-wit meme?” In its classic form you’ve got this picture usually of in-bred Billy Bob whose family tree doesn’t fork on one side saying something real simple like “I just trust my instincts.” On the far right you’ve got Thomas Aquinas saying something like “Just trust your deep instincts, they are probably the deep law written on your heart.” And then in the middle you’ve got some very upset character yelling something like “nooo, I need a source for that, what do the experts say.”

There are some verses in the bible whose common use I think encourages something like the mid-wit meme. Like Jeremiah 29:11, “I have plans for you declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.” Billy Bob, caught up in whatever personal mess, cites that verse. The mid-wit – which often includes us pastors – screams “nooo, you can’t just appropriate that verse to your personal mess. That was given to Israel in exile.” But then St. Thomas would say “Billy Bob is Israel, and this world is exile, and God does have plans.”

Our text from Ruth contains one of those verses. I suppose it has kinda fallen out of favor, but it used to be one of the automatic readings at weddings right alongside of Paul in 1st Corinthians on love. In that wedding it stands as Billy Bob’s or I suppose Billy-Bobbie’s pledge “where you go I will go” to his our her spouse. The mid-wit screams, “no, you can’t just take Ruth’s words to Naomi and apply it to your personal wedding. First of all the genders aren’t right, and then it’s not about a personal pledge to a person, but to a people and….”. Mid-wit gets very verbal. While Luther might say something like. “Christ is in Ruth. Naomi is a hopeless people. God does not abandon his people. Billy-Bob and Billy-Bobbie’s marriage is an image of Christ and the church.”

Text

The text itself appears like a simple story of woe. There is a family that in the midst of famine moves away from their promised home to the land of a historic enemy. And there are some apparent good things that happen to them in that far country – a couple of weddings and their promise – these things are not unmixed blessings. The sons of Israel are marring the daughters of the enemy. And even what is happy turns to woe as all the men die. So what are three widows supposed to do? And while our answers might be very different today, maybe not as different as we might think.

Naomi intends to go back to her extended family as a charity case. And she tells her daughter in-laws to go back to their families, they are young enough to find husbands.

Now there is an ancient world practice, mandated to Israel, that underlies the entire story of Ruth at multiple places. The practice was called Levirite Marriage. The brother of a dead man would take his widow as his own wife and the first child would be reckoned as the child of the deceased. It plays later in Ruth as Boaz functions as this kinsman-redeemer. The point being that the family would not lose it place in the promised land. But here you have Naomi referencing it and the hopelessness. She isn’t going to have more sons that can be the kinsman-redeemer. Her family is cut off from the promise land.

Orpah recognizes Naomi’s logic, and while the good-bye is tearful, she goes back to her father hoping for a new marriage. But Ruth clings to Naomi. And her clinging elicits her pledge. “Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you." (Ruth 1:16-17 ESV)

And so the two widows return to Bethlehem.

**Christological**

Now this is not how we think. Unless we’ve been Mormon probably, we don’t’ think about generations of family. Or maybe it is just me. But I think we have all been raised by our culture to be good individualist consumers. Family might get in the way of consumption of individual desire. Which are primary things to our culture. So we are trained by the culture we live in, even if not directly by our parents, to minimize family.

But God doesn’t do this. Even if he reckons family a little bit differently.

First of all in this simple story we have even in the ancient world our sinful disregard. We place our bellies above family. Naomi’s husband decides that since things are rough in Bethlehem of Judah he should go live with his wife and sons in the historic enemy of Israel – Moab. It’s a repeating pattern of the Old Testament. In Genesis whenever there is trouble, Israel decides to go to Egypt. And every time they sojourn there something terrible happens. Unless God has prepared before hand with a Joseph. But even then, they end up in bondage. And the case is no different here. The sons marry the Moabites and their entire life is now tied in with the world. And the world does what it does…it doesn’t care. It takes everything away. Everything that you thought was yours.

But God has planned in advance. There is no far country you can go to where God is not present for his people. Not even Moab. There is no sin that God is not able to redeem his people from.

How God reckons family is by faith. And faith has a way of ingrafting branches and making physical. Paul reminds us that the promise to Abraham was given to his seed. His argument is in Galatians 3:16. His seed singular, not plural. And the seed of Abraham was Christ. But Matthew reminds us that the seed of Abraham passes through this Moabite – Ruth. That’s in his genealogy at the start of his gospel. Ruth’s profession of family is also a profession of faith. “Your people shall be my people, and your God my God.” And so Ruth has been ingrafted into the promise by faith.

But Christ is also in Ruth, literally as a great-great-grandmother, but more importantly Christ is in Ruth in a promise. “Where you die I die, and there I will be buried. And May the Father to so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.” Naomi is helpless us. We have been promised and abandoned by the world. We have been left alone and desperate. We have followed our bellies to a far country. But there in our sinful state we find Christ and his promise. The pledge of Ruth is the pledge of Christ to sinners. We went to a far country, and he came to us. We lived in these temporary bodies and he became incarnate in one. He died and was buried.

Where the world abandons us, Christ never does. And because Christ never did. The Father raised him from the dead.

And because Christ is raised, we can return to Bethlehem.

Christ is in Ruth. He words are His promise to us.

**Moral**

 If we are smart we accept them. If we are smart we react like Naomi and take the hope when given. We are tempted to think that Ruth’s words are the pledge that we should give to God. And we should, but we have no means of keeping it. We are the hopeless ones in need of God’s pledge to us. Which we have. The correct response is Naomi’s. “when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more. So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. (Ruth 1:18 ESV)”

If God has determined to save us, accept the salvation and return to Bethlehem – the house of bread. Return to the house of your family. God has sent his salvation to this far country to bring us back. Stop talking like the mid-wit and accept it. What are you going to do, fight God forever?

**Eschatological**

Because that is the definition of hell, forever being against God. Forever being against the good that God has planned for you.

Now I don’t think Naomi has a clue what God has planned at this stage. She just accepts it. Something like Mary kept these things and pondered them in her heart. In the fullness of time we will know.

But it would not surprise me if in the final wedding banquet we here exactly Ruth’s words. These are the words of the bridegroom Christ to the bride his church. These are the words that he kept. And Paul reminds us that our marriages are icons are images of Christ and the church. No image is a perfect reflection of the original. No icon allows you to see everything good about the reality it captures. Such are our marriages.

But Ruth is an appropriate verse for a wedding. They are acts of faith that create a family. They are pledges that we choose Bethlehem over the world. And may God so bless the image as he has blessed the reality. May Christ show up at our Cana too, as he has blessed His own with the bread and wine of gladness. Amen.