### “May the Lord Deal Kindly with You” by S. Finlan, at First Church

October 28, 2018

**Ruth 1:1–19**

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. 2The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi. . . . 3Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. 4These took Moabite wives. . . . After ten years, they also died, so that the woman was left without her two sons or her husband. . . . 7 They started to go back to the land of Judah. 8 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. . . . 11Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands?” 12Turn back, my daughters, go your way. 13It has been far more bitter for me than for you.”

14Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. 15 So she said, “See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.” 16But Ruth said, “Do not press me to leave you or 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. 17Where you die, I will die—and there I will be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!” 18When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more.

19 So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem.

The book of Ruth concerns love, marriage, migration, death, loyalty, friendship. . . and then surprising love. Naomi is a Jewish woman living in Moab, east of the Dead Sea. Her husband dies, but she had two sons. They grow up and marry Moabite girls, but then both sons die. Naomi has lost *three* men. Her daughters-in-law have each lost one man. That is why Naomi says it has been more bitter for her. But she is thinking about them. She doesn’t want them to live as spinsters, so she tries to send them back to their ancestral homes in Moab, while she goes back to Judah.

It’s a touching scene as she says good-bye to her young friends. One of them weeps and kisses her, and agrees to go back to Moab. But Ruth will not go back. She will follow Naomi; will observe Judean ways, and worship the Judean god. Ruth will, in fact, *become* a Judean. She will marry a Judean, Boaz, and they will have a son.

Front and center in this book is the issue of openness to the Gentiles. If Ezra or Nehemiah had been around, they would force Boaz to divorce Ruth and send her out of the land. Ezra and Nehemiah, each of whom have books in their name in the Bible, are vehemently opposed to any intermarriage between Gentiles and Jews. Numbers and some other books share this view. But the Book of Ruth is clearly on the opposite side of this issue. The author makes the foreigner, Ruth, the hero of the book, and for good reason—her strength, courage, and kindness are models for everyone.

The Book of Ruth stands *dead set* against the hyper-nationalism of Ezra and Nehemiah. The Gospel of Matthew affirms Ruth in an important way. The book starts with an “account of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah” (1:1), and it lists “Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David” (1:5–6). The line continues on to “Joseph the husband of Mary” (1:16).

So the genealogy of Jesus includes not only King David, but also Ruth and some other Gentiles.

Well, most of us are Gentiles, and we should be grateful to Ruth, and the Isaiahs, and Jesus, and Paul, for insisting that Gentiles are included in the family of God.

Many have gone before us, many are with us now, and many will come after us. We are part of a great family, longer and wider than we can imagine. But we *do* imagine, and we do remember, our loved ones who went before us.

This is the Sunday closest to All Saints Day, and to All Souls Day, so I thought we could think about some of our dear departed. We don’t emphasize genealogies much nowadays, but we recall our memories of the people closest to us.

I remember my father, who was a humble and decent guy, who let me express my opinions and never argued with me about them, even when I said, shortly after my conversion experience, that I thought the Catholic Church might be the Antichrist. He was a loyal Catholic his whole life, yet he didn’t take offense or try to argue me down. I dropped that position before long.

As I grew he supported me, he was proud that I went to university and got degrees. He felt guilty about not being able to help me pay for my education, and I finally had to tell him, “don’t worry about me, Dad; I’ll be alright. You don’t have to help me with money any more.”

He became a little drifty only in the last six months of his life, and died in his eighties in California, while I was living in New Jersey. I miss my Dad, and I look forward to meeting him again. I also look forward to meeting my Mom, who was much more touchy, but was quite intelligent, and would take me to the library. I can’t wait to brag to her about the books I wrote. I certainly believe that the Lord will deal kindly with them.

Now I invite you to think about a departed loved one, even just to mention his or her name, or to share a memory, if you choose to.

It is right to remember our loved ones and take time to reflect upon their legacy, their strength, which intertwine with *our* experiences, and form part of *our* foundation. All good things are saved in God.