**SERMON 3-15-2020**

**RUTH 1:1-19A**

A man and his wife were enjoying a relaxing drive through the country side.

As so often happened as they rode along together, his wife suddenly said:

“Howard, did you see that?”

He glanced around, and responded,

“No, I didn't notice anything, Annie. What did you see?”

"There were two falcons flying together. They looked like

          they were dancing with each other. It was beautiful."

Howard looked around to see if he could spot the falcons,

          but they were nowhere to be seen.

“I'm sorry I missed them.”

"You need to open your eyes wider," she laughed, "you miss so many things.

As they continued driving along in companionable silence,

          Howard realized he often missed seeing, or noticing, what Annie saw.

Of course, he was usually the one driving.

And he did need to pay attention to the road.

He began to wonder how often he missed seeing what God was doing in his life,

          and in the world, because he wasn't looking in God's direction.

When we are only focused on what we are doing, we can miss so much.

We often fail to see God working in our lives, and in the world around us.

If we open our eyes, as well as our hearts, we might be surprised

          by how often God is with us and guiding us.

It is easy to miss seeing God working in our lives,

          especially in times of trouble, and distress, and grief.

Ruth is a story about ordinary people, going through the problems of life.

Because Ruth's author did not hammer his points home,

          it is possible to overlook his deeper meaning.

Concentrate on the loving bond between Ruth and Naomi.

This love, which thrived in suffering, is the root of the book.

It offers hope for other people in hard circumstances.

Ruth was a Moabite, a fact which would have greatly impressed

          the original readers.

Moab and Israel were bitter enemies, and Ruth took a risk

          by emigrating to a land that might treat her as a despised foreigner.

This story of family love, and loyalty took place during the time of the judges,

          when murder, immorality, and general anarchy prevailed.

Ruth is a heart-warming story.

There are no bad guys in Ruth.

All the characters behaved reasonably,

          they all thought about the wellbeing of others.

This short story portrays love's power to triumph over sorrow and hopelessness,

          and to bridge differences in family, race, and religion.

In the story of Ruth, we encounter a family:

          Elimelech, his wife Naomi,

          their two sons: Mahlon and Kilion.

Because of a famine, Elimelech traveled with his family to Moab.

Mahlon and Kilion married Moabite women: Ruth and Orpah.

Everything appears to be going well with this family – until disaster strikes.

Elimelech, and then both his sons, die.

Tragedy, disaster, and misfortune, often strike when we least expect it.

God does not send evil, but He corrects and overturns it

          with faith, hope and love.

Without faith and hope in God, the world is a very bitter and frightening place.

Naomi heard rumors that her homeland, Israel, was doing well.

God was helping his people by sustaining their harvests

          and blessing them with rich returns.

Hope may have been there, but it was a hope far off,

          and one that definitely was neither certain, nor easy.

Yet it was enough to draw Naomi home.

Naomi urged both her daughters-in-law to return to their own families and gods.

Orpah finally turned back.

But Ruth refused to leave Naomi, insisting:

          "Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay.

          Your people will be my people, and your God my God.

          Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried."

Ruth the Moabite seemed to have more faith than Naomi the Jew.

The book of Ruth is a short story about love,

          but even more importantly, a story of incredible faith.

The evidence of her faith was found in stepping out into the unknown

          while trusting God when she left her culture, her gods, and her family behind.

God was credited with bringing Ruth to Boaz's field.

God's law brought Boaz and Ruth into marriage.

Finally, the Lord gave them a son.

They named him Obed

Obed became the father of Jessie

Jessie became the father of David.

God's plan extended beyond Ruth and Naomi's personal problems.

Ruth was a member of the despised Moabites – enemies of Israel.

Yet God not only accepted her into his family,

          He also used her to produce Israel's greatest king.

Ruth's great-grandson was David the king.

To anyone who thought that God's love was for Israelites only,

          Ruth's life made a striking contradiction.

But the story of Ruth does not end even here.

Ruth was not only the great grandmother of King David,

          she was also the ancestor of our Lord Jesus Christ, God's promised Messiah.

Through relationships with one another, God brings about miracles.

Ruth not only committed herself to Naomi,

          she committed herself to Naomi's people and to Naomi's God.

Her commitment was personal, voluntary, and complete.

The story of Ruth begins with great despair, and ends with even greater joy.

It is a story of endurance, encouragement, hope, and faith.

It teaches us God has a plan even in our worst tragedies.

We serve a God who can take the worst and turn it into the best,

          because that's the kind of God He is.

When bad things come our way, we need to give God time to work.

He knows what He is doing, even when we don't have a clue.

If we open our eyes, and our hearts, and look around,

          we just might catch a glimpse of what He is doing.

God specializes in the hopeless, the lost, the hurting.

We may not notice what he is doing.

But he does have plans for us.

He does care about us, and He loves us.

Always.

AMEN