

First Baptist Church of Fitchburg

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October 4th, 2020, World Communion Sunday, 18th Sunday after Pentecost

Paster: Rev. Meredith H. Christian Musician: Marilyn Carter Song Leader: May Goff



Welcome and Announcements:

Good morning Congregation. May we continually pray for each other more than we do for ourselves and our own situations, knowing that our brothers and sisters in Christ are praying for us in this same way, and that our Savior, Jesus Christ prays to the Father in agreement with us. How encouraging? How empowering! The only thing left between Jesus and the Father in regards to our situation is us, His Bride, the church and our own closed and covered mouths. May we be a three stranded cord. May we open our mouths like Isaiah and courageously declare the things of the Lord in our lives together in unity this and every morning. Amen.

You are most welcome to share your concerns and celebrations with me or your deacons, who will forward them to myself directly if desired. My email is meredithchristian@gmail.com and phone is (774) 276-0505.

Call to Worship: (In unison)

On this World Communion Sunday may we look beyond our differences in culture, color, and custom, and turn our eyes upon Jesus. We join our voices in praise and our hearts in fellowship, as we join together in service where the Lord has placed us, in unity with our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world, in serving His children in the name of His Son, Jesus, in whose Name we pray. Amen.

Invocation:

Here in this place, there are no foreigners, for all are welcome in God's house. Here in this worship, there is only acceptance, for love is the language of faith. Here in our lives, there are no divisions, for God dwells in each of us, and all have one thing in common-our mutual faith in Jesus Christ. Bless our worship together, and strengthen our bonds of love and faith, we ask in Christ's name. Amen.

Gloria Patri:

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be
world without end. Amen, Amen.*

Hymn: *"Jesus Is All the World to Me"* # 627 (Click on link) <https://youtu.be/jh6TR7Szlgc>

First Reading: *Psalm 61*

"Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. From the ends of the earth I call to you, I call as my heart grows faint; lead me to the rock that is higher than I. For you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the foe. I long to dwell in your tent forever and take refuge in the shelter of your wings. For you, God, have heard my vows; you have given me the heritage of those who fear your name. Increase the days of the king's life, his years for many generations. May he be enthroned in God's presence forever; appoint your love and faithfulness to protect him. Then I will ever sing in praise of your name and fulfill my vows day after day.

Celebrations and Concerns followed by a moment of Silent Prayer:

Prayers for Eric Mbunwe and his family on the passing of his aunt Helena, My uncle Bob and our leadership.

Pastoral Prayer:

On this World Communion Sunday it is appropriate for us to remember in prayer those millions of Christians around the world who are gathered to worship You, the only God, and to acknowledge Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. We are comfortable and safe here today, but we know that many other Christians face personal danger because they have declared themselves to be followers of Christ. We pray for their safety, and we ask that their witness will be effective.

“We praise You for providing our dwelling place: a house, rented or owned, an apartment, condo, shelter, dorm room, bench, cover under a bridge. Wherever we lie to rest our heads, we thank You. Thank You for rest, restoration, and breath in our lungs. Bless and heal all those who seek refuge in hospitals, medical centers, hospice, and nursing homes. To breathe every day takes on a new meaning when we’re brought to our knees with illness, accident, and age.

Forgive us for complaining about our circumstances, whether it be from our homes or in our ailments. We are still placed purposefully. Help us to live out every breath with the intention of opening the door to Gospel change, no matter what our door looks like or which ones we walk through each day” (*Bucher*), as we pray the prayer that Jesus taught us to pray,

***Our Father**, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil, for Thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory forever. Amen.*

Children's Message: (by Debi Cross)

Three Wishes

I am sure that most of you have read a book, seen a movie, or at least heard the story about "Aladdin and His Wonderful Lamp." In one version of the story, Aladdin worked in a shop that exchanged new lamps for old ones. Aladdin's job was to polish the lamps and make them look like new. One day, as he was polishing a lamp, a genie came out of the lamp and promised to grant Aladdin anything he wished. With the help of the Genie, Aladdin gained great wealth and won the love of a beautiful princess.

Wouldn't it be wonderful to have your every wish come true? You might think so, but the truth is, sometimes the things we wish for are not good for us. Our Bible story today is about a young man called the prodigal son who had three wishes.

1. He wanted a lot of money.
2. He wanted to travel and see the world.
3. He wanted to be his own boss.

The young man got his wishes, but they were not granted to him by a genie. The young man went to his father and asked him to give him the inheritance that would be his when his father died. Even though the father was sad that his son wanted to leave, he gave him his share of the family fortune and the young man left home and traveled all around the world. He visited all of the places he had always wanted to visit and did whatever he wanted to do. He was happy that no one was telling him what to do. Since the young man had a lot of money, if he saw something he wanted, he bought it, and since he had a lot of money, he also had many friends.

This sounds like very happy story, doesn't it? Well, that isn't the end of the story. After a while, the young man ran out of money. When he ran out of money, his friends ran out on him. He was so desperate that he went to work for a man who sent him to feed his pigs. The young man was so hungry that he would gladly have eaten the food he was feeding to the pigs. As he looked at the filthy pig pen, he thought about the mess he had made of his life. He thought about his father and the home he had left behind.

"Even a servant in my father's house lives better than this," the young man said to himself. "I will return to my father and tell him that I am sorry for the way I have behaved and ask him to give me a job as one of his servants."

Do you think the father was willing to take him back? Yes, but not as a servant. He welcomed him back home as a son. He called his servants together and told them, "Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was lost, but now is found."

Well, the story had a happy ending after all, didn't it? This story that Jesus told is really a story about you and me and the way we sometimes behave.

Sometimes you and I make bad choices -- just like the young man in our story. We sometimes wish for things that are not good for us. We sometimes don't want to listen to God and obey what the Bible tells us we should do. When we act that way, we really make a mess of our life, Well, I have good news for you! Just like the father in our story, God, our Heavenly Father, is always willing to take us back if we will admit that we were wrong and return to Him.

Prayer: Dear Father, we sometimes make bad choices. Help us to make good choices and stay with You. Thank you for being a loving Father who will always take us back when we come home to you. Amen

Blessing of the Tithes, Offerings and Gifts:

Gracious God, we lift up our tithes and offerings as an expression of our unity with the body of Christ. As our checks and currency blend together in the offering basket to fulfill their appointed purpose, so also may our Christian lives and devoted service blend together to bring peace and healing to our hurting world. Amen.

(Tithes, offerings, and gifts are greatly appreciated as a means to continue to care for our facilities, the needs of each other, and our local and worldwide community. We thank you for your pledges at this time and ask that you [Please Pray over your gifts](#) and mail them to the church at [1400 John Fitch Hwy, Fitchburg MA 01420](#)).

Doxology:

*Praise God from whom all blessings flow
Praise Him all creatures here below
Praise Him above ye heavenly hosts
Praise Father Son and Holy Ghost.*

Sermon Text: Ruth 1:1-6 & 4: 13-16

"In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. The man's name was Elimelek, his wife's name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there.

Now Elimelek, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

When Naomi heard in Moab that the LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there.

Naomi Gains a Son

So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife, and he went in to her, and the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. The women said to Naomi: "Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth."

Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him.

"Knowing Your Place"

It is good to be back here among all of you. Many of our sisters and brothers are still in their homes, awaiting a time when it will be safe for them to once again return to this, their church, their home. Until that time, I pray that they feel as though they are among us, who love and pray for them, wherever they are, and that they feel assured of God's Presence joining us with them on this Sunday morning. The book of *Ruth*, of which I focus primarily on the beginning and the end, is a pictorial of the importance of our position in God's will for our lives, and the importance of not only trusting that God sees us, wherever we are, but also that He has designed protection, provision and blessing that are available to us when we stand within His will for our lives.

Some of you this morning may feel as though you are currently in a place of attack, that the enemy has surrounded you, hemming you in on all sides and has you cornered. Perhaps you may feel as though you won't be able to hold your position for much longer. Time seems short, money and resources may be dwindling, patience may be wearing out.

You may be sitting here today thinking, "How long, O Lord, will it be before you show up in my situation?". Some may even be thinking that all this is happening because you are out of God's will for your lives. You haven't been praying, reading your Bibles, doing the things you know God has called you to do, and it may be that you have found yourself frustrated or in a place of despair.

It is frustrating when we do not know what is going on, what is going to happen. We look at the situation around us and try to come up with a game plan for our next moves. Do we stay or do we go, do we try to move forward or wait a bit? When should we move and how? These are all valid and mature questions. It seems like others around us have their plans and are moving ahead at record speed, and we want to be sure we move in God's timing, yet we have to do something because the attacks of the enemy seem to be coming at the worst possible time.

Good News beloved, our God is omnipresent. Our enemy, the devil does not know the God's timing, but he does sometimes recognize the location of our blessings. For instance, even the enemies of Israel knew full well that their place was not amongst the Moabites.

There was no life in Moab. Moab was a place cursed with death and suffering because, "Moabites were descended sinfully from Lot because he failed to go to the place God had directed him, and ended up in a place of sin that resulted in the Moabite and Amorite people (*Genesis 19*). Moab was an enemy of Israel;

"No Ammonite or Moabite or any of their descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, not even in the tenth generation. For they did not come to meet you with bread and water on your way when you came out of Egypt, and they hired Balaam...to pronounce a curse on you. However, the LORD your God would not listen to Balaam but turned the curse into a blessing for you, because the LORD your God loves you. Do not seek a treaty of friendship with them as long as you live" (*Deuteronomy 23:3-6*).

Elimelek and his family looked over at Moab and thought God was too busy blessing people over in Moab to deal with the famine in Bethlehem, and so he moved his family to the place where he thought God was moving. The short reprieve that the people of Moab were said to be receiving was mistaken for the blessings of God, and that confusion nearly killed the promise for this family.

Elimelek should have remembered that *God is still King* in Judah. Neither son should not have placed himself in a relationship with a Moabitess. Perhaps they knew no better. Elimelek and Naomi both had a responsibility to their children to teach them who they were in the Lord and their place in it.

Think about it, the father, the one responsible for the protection and provision of this family dies, leaving two sickly sons, who marry, and after 10 years of marriage, no kids. And rest assured that the problem was with the sons and God's refusal to bless these couples who were out of place. We know this because the Lord later enabled Ruth to conceive (*v.13*) in Bethlehem, the house of bread, the place of God's blessing.

After the passing of her sons Naomi was called out of Moab to return home. She had heard that God was blessing His people, and understood that it was time to go back home to the place where God was providing for the people of Israel. She wanted the two young women, now widows of her sons, to have the covering, protection and support of their own people, so she encouraged them to return to the place of their parent's homes, where they would be cared for and might find the blessing of a good marriage to a Moabite man.

The Bible is full of accounts of people being pulled out of their circumstances in order to be led to a place of service for the Lord, and the issue of being in the right place at the time of the blessing seems critical to God. I am not just talking about a place of humility and contriteness, I mean the physical places we rest in or wander

in life are significant. God's children do not just land where they land. They have the free will to come and go as they chose, but in doing so, they chose places that will either become a blessing or a curse to them and their families.

Moses led the people out of the place of Pharaoh's control. Joshua was called to lead Israel into the place that God had set aside for them in the land of Israel, Job dwelled within a protective hedge. Satan could not touch him in that place. The prodigal son we heard about in Debi's children's message described a young man who left the security, and affection of his home in order to go out in the world and found that only when he returned home and found a place within his father's household would he again know the blessings of provision, security, protection and peace. These passages show us that, "The edge of your next blessing will often be in the place of your greatest frustration" (*Steve Furtick*).

Naomi's family was out of place. She was in a place that had taken the most important things in her life from her, her husband and children, and so there was no point in toiling in the place she had traveled to in order to protect her family from the struggles back at home. They were gone, so in frustration and despair, she determined to return home, which turned out to be the right thing to do.

God was providing for His people in Judah. If the focus were on the person, God could have blessed her from all the way over in Moab. He is a Great Physician without borders indeed! God wasn't blessing them just because they were His people, His blessings were specific to Judah. The Lord came to the aid of His people in Judah (v. 6).

What happened when she returned to the place of God's presence and provision is that she saw the restoration of her family line, through a husband of her lineage, Boaz. She was re-grafted into her own lineage, and then, by God's mercy and grace, fused into the line of David, and through him, Jesus, the Savior of us all.

What is our place? It is at the place of the cross where we find our blessing as Christians. The cross is our place of right standing, forgiveness and provision as we feed on the Bread of Life, which is Jesus Christ, and Living Water, which is His Spirit. The place of the cross looks like a place of death, and it is.

It is a place where we find the death of our sin, condemnation, shame, despair and humiliation. We leave it all there before the feet of Jesus who paid the price for us to be relieved of our curse so that we can walk anew in a place of forgiveness before Almighty God for eternity. As I said, the cross does not look like a place of life or freedom, but looks are often deceiving.

Famous author, T.H. White once recalled being in a very precarious place. He recounts a surprise from his father on one of his birthdays, "My father made me a wooden castle big enough to get into, and he fixed real pistol barrels beneath its battlements to fire a salute on my birthday, but made me sit in front the first night...to receive the salute, and I, believing I was to be shot, cried" (*White*). Sometimes, in our miss understanding of our Heavenly Father's good intentions, we too sit and cry as we are unaware that we are surrounded by blessings, because it looks to us as a curse. Sometimes not understanding the blessing, feels like your about to be shot.

As it turned out, this traumatizing event had an odd effect on that little boy. He went on to devote his life to the study of the medieval period of history and write the famous book *The Sword And The Stone*. Had he had the maturity of putting aside his own interpretation of his surroundings and been able to focus instead on the fact that his father loved him, and desired good and wonderful things for his life, he would not have been so distressed as he sat there, awaiting his birthday "blessing".

Of course Mr. White's father desired to do something good for him, even though we here would call his approach seriously misguided. This event did occur in another land, before the first World War. If his earthly father would so go out of his way to bless his child, how much more does our own perfect, heavenly Father desire good and wonderful things for each of us? I wonder, how many blessings does our lack of maturity cause us to panic over, or to dread?

The trouble often is that as we look around at where we are, we see glimpses of things that look scary and make a decision that their purpose is to destroy us. I will not deny this can sometime be the case, but not always. Sometimes the weapons we see are intended for another purpose. In the words of a father who raised his children in what can often be a very dangerous place, South East Alaska, “The best things are often behind the scariest doors” (*Billy Brown*).

Another thing that the book of *Ruth* brings to light is that just because you are in a place of famine, that does not mean you are in the wrong place, or that you are not still blessed. God may be blessing you with provision in the midst of the famine, as He protected Noah during the flood. Noah went through it, but he did not let his circumstances drown him.

This book and chapter end on a high note. No sooner does Naomi return home then she immediately begins to experience blessings and provision from God as He restored to her a husband for Ruth, and a son in the form of a grandchild. Yes she also was made secure financially and it seems she was healthy, but the truest sign of her being blessed had little to do with monetary things, or the types of things we attribute to prosperity. She was given family and security and a place to rest, and love, and grow in the place where God would one day send a prophet to anoint her great-great-grandson David as king over all Israel.

Even Ruth, as she submitted to her mother-in-law and placed her life in Naomi’s hands was blessed to shed the curse of her Moabite lineage and be graphited into the royal lineage of our savior Jesus, not because of who she was or luck, but because she put herself in a position to submit to God’s authority and honored the guidance of the new mother He had given her. The place of God’s blessing is in the place of right standing with God. When we put down our will and say, “Lord your will be done”, when we seek righteousness and the will of God in our lives, we walk out anew in forgiveness and wholeness in Christ.

There are only two places to go after this life, the place of Heaven, where there is Bread of Life, Living Water, where God’s mercies endure forever, or a place that is completely devoid of God, Hell. Hell is a place of eternal suffering, aloneness, anguish and agony. It is a place where people will remember forever the words that they heard about eternal salvation through Christ. They will know that they know that every word about insuring an eternity of peace with God and all their saved loved ones was true, yet they rejected it because to receive Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior meant they had to say no to the things that they wanted, things they liked, things that felt good at the time.

Those that chose to keep their rights to make their own choices, their own ways, or designed their own god that they could control, who would allow them to rule over their own lives, will have all the time there is to think about how close they were to bowing their knee, and wills and receiving the Truth that is Jesus Christ, and despair at the fact that they never did get around to it.

They meant to, after the fun weekend they planned, after they told the last lie they needed in order to cover for themselves, after they got what they wanted through their manipulations, that despite what they know, there will be nothing, Nothing that they will ever be able to do about it. Nothing they can ever control again. They will be assured that they had a chance at true freedom through a relationship with the Messiah and they rejected it for....nothing that was worth forever, and ever, and ever, and ever, and ever.

Seem repetitive? That wasn’t even half a minute. Eternity, just when you cannot possibly image another second, will leave you with more behind you than what you have already suffered. Forget the fires of Hell, oh they are there, but knowing you blew it while your burning, now that to me is Hell. Don’t do it. If you have any doubt that you may have even fallen out of touch with Jesus I beg you to stop whatever you are doing or thinking about right now and be sure you are in the right place. Be in the place of forgiveness. Be assured that you have put your eternal life in the hands of Almighty God.

I know that I am standing in the glory of God, even when I fail to choose His best for my life. If you are unsure, or if you feel God tugging on your heart, He says, “Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with that person, and they with me” (*Revelation 3:19-20*) Is He knocking? If so, repeat after me, and those of you who are saved, you are welcome to repeat this as well:

Let us pray:

Merciful God, I know that I am a sinner, and that I have placed other things before you in my life. I thank you Jesus for taking the place that I deserve on the cross. I apologize for all my sins, known and unknown and I ask that you forgive me, come into my heart, be my Lord and Savior. Give me the strength to turn away from sin. Lord I thank You for cleansing me of all sin. Lord, thank you for standing in the gap. Take me to the place of Your greatest blessing, I pray in Jesus’ name.

Communion Service

Communion Hymn: “*Just As I Am*” # 354 (Billy Graham Crusade) <https://youtu.be/yuNFAB4mTn8>
(Mahalia Jackson) <https://youtu.be/tw-g4-DTKfU>

In the Baptist tradition this is a covenant meal, which we partake of in remembrance of what Jesus has done on the cross for each of us. It is our understanding that all who profess Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior are welcome to share in this meal, which we partake of together, in the presence of the Lord. Please collect your bread and cup in preparation of our remembrance meal.

Before partaking of this meal, the members of the First Baptist Church of Fitchburg take a moment to read and remember our church covenant, which we proclaim as one body, in one voice untied in Christ.

The Church Covenant (*May those of us who are members proclaim our church covenant.*)

“Having been led, as we believe, by the Holy Spirit, to accept Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord, and upon profession of our faith, having been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, we now entre into Covenant with one another, as one body in Christ.

We promise, as the Lord shall enable us, to strive daily to love according to the spirit and teachings of Christ, and to do all in our power to create a spiritual atmosphere within the Church, which will lead others to come into fellowship with God and into saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

As a fellowship of Christians, we promise by the help of God to nurture Christian growth in our homes, and to minister to the spiritual and material needs of one another. We further promise to strive for the advancement of our church in worship, in Christian Education, in service, and in fellowship; to observe its ordinances; to attend its services as faithfully as possible; to contribute regularly to its local and missionary enterprises; to unite with some other church when living away; and by personal and group example, to commend the Christian way of life to all.

May the blessing of God our Father, Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord, and the Holy Spirit our Helper and Guide ever rest upon us.”

Communion Prayer:

“Unto Him who is the author and giver of all good, *we* render sincere and humble thanks for His manifold and unmerited blessings, and especially for our redemption and salvation by His beloved Son” (*John Jay*). We come to the table in humility, and repentance. We approach in forgiveness, just as we have been fully forgiven by our Lord. May He bless this bread and cup and may the remembrance of Jesus’ sacrifice be a restorative to our bodies, minds and spirits, for we ask this in His holy name. Amen.

Words of Institution:

On the night that Jesus knew would be His last with them before the cross, our Lord gathered His disciples together for the Passover meal. They were all in one place and of one accord, each untied in the mission of observing God's ordinance. Soon, one would remove himself from the presence of Jesus and go to a place of betrayal. Let us now partake of the Bread and Cup in unity with each other, and Christians around the world as we commune with the Spirit of God.

The Bread:

On that long ago evening, Jesus took the bread, asked the Father to bless it, broke it and shared it with those around Him, saying, "*Take, eat, do this in remembrance of Me*" (Luke 22:19).

Take, Eat.

The Cup:

"*In the same way, after the supper He took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is poured out for you"* (Luke 22:20).

Take, Drink.

And so we proclaim Jesus and remember Him, until His return!

After the meal, Jesus and His disciples went out to the Mount of Olives and sang hymns. Please join me in heart and spirit in singing the first verse of our traditional closing hymn,

Hymn:

"Blest Be The Tie"

*Blessed be the tie that binds, Our hearts in Christian love;
The fellowship of kindred minds , Is like that to that above.*

Benediction:

May we go forth with this confidence: that the God of all creation has guided us to the place of His covering, for such a time as this, for His glory and honor. May the love of God exhibited within each of us draw people into His loving embrace, in Jesus' name. Amen.

May the Lord bless and keep you all



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