

"How You Make A Difference"

Last week we celebrated All Saints Day. It is a day to thank God for the brave souls who paved the way for us and passed the Gospel down to us. All Saints Day remembers and celebrates the lives of the saints of Christian history and saintly souls that have touched and blessed our lives.

When we look at our biblical lineage, that is the saints who have modeled faith in God for us, we find the name of Ruth. She is remembered for how she trusted God for her future. Less well remembered is Boaz, the man who married Ruth. He trusted God as well in making right choices. At the time they could not have realized that together they would have lasting impact on the course of history. For one of their descendants was David the king of Israel and of course Jesus, the messiah, was of the house and lineage of David.

The choices we make today - choosing to walk in faith with God (or not) - have far reaching consequences for future generations; not just your children and grandchildren, but for all those who may enter this church in the future, and the many people whom you meet throughout your lifetime.

How It Began

Ruth was the daughter-in-law of Naomi, an Israelite woman and widow who had moved to be with her son who lived in a foreign land, and had married a woman of that land - that is, Ruth. Well the son died leaving Naomi without a son to care for her, and Ruth a widow. Widows in those days had no pension, social security, or life insurance to collect on their husbands. Without a husband or sons, the widow had no one to care for her. That is why in Hebrew culture brothers and male kinsmen of deceased were enjoined to marry and/or care for widows. That is why Naomi decided to return to her home in Israel and urged Ruth to return to her family. Ruth had lost all, but rather than returning to her home she committed herself to her mother-in-law saying, "Your land will be my land, and your God will be my God." She remained steadfast in faith to God for her future.

Naomi - now accompanied by Ruth - returned to the village of her kinsmen and looked for opportunity to find that someone to care for herself and Ruth. This is where Boaz comes in. Naomi advised her daughter-in-law, Ruth, to glean grain from the field of one of her kinsmen and then to find him and seek his protection.

The course Naomi advised appears strange to us; but it was according to the laws and usages of Israel. If the proposed measure had borne the appearance of evil, Naomi would not have advised it. Law and custom gave Ruth, who was now proselyte to the true religion, a legal claim upon Boaz. It was customary for widows to assert this claim (see Deuteronomy 25:5-10).

Now there was another kinsmen, who according to a closer kinship and custom, had first say in the matter of taking Ruth - and Naomi - into his household (Ruth 4:1-8). This matter depended on the laws given by Moses about inheritances. This kinsman, when he heard the terms of the relationship, refused it. In some ways it is not unlike those who shy away from taking Christ into their household. They speak well of Him, may give Him a good word, but cannot be bound to Him for fear of marring their own inheritance in this world. Men and women are ready to seize opportunities for increasing their estates, but few know the value of godliness. This kinsman, who was afraid of lessening himself and marring his inheritance, is forgotten to history.

The Right Choices Make a Difference

The right to marry and care for Ruth was then assigned to Boaz. He could have insisted that the other man should take Ruth as his wife, or he could have ignored that man going straight for what he wanted. But Boaz remained steadfast to God, committed to the law, always choosing to do what was honorable. And so he was united with Ruth. He was focused on doing what is right; he could not have known what a difference his choices would have for the destiny of Israel and all humanity. That is how it is with us. It would be easy to say to ourselves that what we do here, and outside of here, has little impact. It is easy to cut corners in honesty, integrity, doing what is right, thinking no one will notice, or "everyone else is doing it." It is easier to assume someone else will take care of things, or pay the bills, or attend those meetings, or engage in that ministry, than to commit to it our selves. Yet when we take the easy way we miss making a difference. Our action, or inaction, has a big impact down the line. I learned working in construction that the measurements we made on the ground floor for a multi-story office building had to be precise. If we were off even a fraction of an inch, we would be off by a several feet by the time we built the top floor.

So too, even our small actions and choices can have significant impact down the line. What we do today makes a difference for the future.

God does not call the equipped, but equips the called. God equips you and me to carry out His mission. What's the number one requirement for being in God's service? It's simply saying "yes" to God. If not you, who will? If not now, when? You make the difference.

When Boaz first saw Ruth gleaning grain from his field he had a moment of choice: he did not belittle this widow from a foreign land, he praised her diligence. When Ruth heard instruction from Naomi she had a moment of choice: she could have shied away from it, but she chose to follow her mother-in-law's advice. Again Boaz had a moment of choice when he took Ruth as his wife. At each of these moments the choice is made in favor of what righteous living calls for. Prayer to God attended the marriage, and praise to him attended the birth of the child. Is this something we are prone to forget when such blessings come into our families?

Choices Make Destinies

In due time Ruth bore a son, through whom thousands and myriads were born to God. As the lineal ancestor of Christ, she was instrumental in the happiness of all who would be saved by him; even of us Gentiles, not of Jewish descent. She was a witness for God to the Gentile world, that in due time they should become one with his chosen people, and partake of his salvation. Many centuries later in Bethlehem greater to control the counsels of the Roman master of the world, and draw princes and wise men from the east, with treasures of gold, and frankincense, and myrrh to his feet. His name shall endure forever, and through him all the nations of the earth shall be blessed. At the time Ruth and Boaz could not have foreseen all of this, but they made a difference.

We are so fortunate that God has given us the blessing to live in a place and time where we have so much in resources to put to His purposes. What we do with our time and our money today has great impact for future generations. Because of our giving to God's work we are able to be in mission in many ways at FUMC. We support overseas missions as well as local missions - from hurricane and flood relief worldwide, to local school children and the homeless. Thanks to the monies and volunteer hours received for God's work at FUMC, we can give Bibles to every child finishing 3rd grade, provide Sunday school materials for children and adults and good, clean rooms for our classes. You and I make the difference. Each month our people receive these resources (copy of Upper Room & newsletter) of news and food for the spirit, thanks to the many

offerings to God's mission here at FUMC. Without our staff here at FUMC: our Pastor, Director of Worship and Music, Choir Director, Pianist, Organist, bell choir directors, Office Manager, youth coordinator, children and family ministries coordinator, office assistant, treasurer, finance secretary, nursery attendants, facilities staff, and what I call all our "unpaid staff" - those who give of their time to do so many of the things needed done around here and beyond - without all of them our ministry would be greatly diminished. We are grateful for all the offering to God's work that makes it possible for us to have this staff.

We have a clean, well-lighted nursery and nursery attendant, thanks to the many gifts received for God's work at FUMC. Because of the monies received for God's work, we are able to have a good sound system so that our worship service can be enjoyed by all, and tapes of the services can be taken to shut-ins. We make a difference when we make choices for God. Because of the monies we have received for God's work we are able to buy music, maintain organ, have pianos tuned, candles, robes, outings for our acolytes and our buildings are kept warm, dry, clean, and safe for all our ministries. And because of the system of accountability we have in place, an insistence on integrity, and the honesty of our Finance Secretary, Treasurer and Counters, we have assurance that all monies received for God's work go directly to its intended purpose. (These faithful servants very carefully count and record all that is received and provide you with a record of your giving.)

Lastly, I would be remiss if I did not mention that God has blessed us with a land in which we can practice our faith in Christ, even tell of the hope we have in Him to others, without fear of serious persecution. This is all the more reason for us to take seriously our fellowship with believers who suffer for their faith in Christ. It is fitting that at least once a year we remember those who suffer for their faith in Christ. We must do our part to inform the world of atrocities committed against Christians and remember how they remain steadfast, committed, and united in faith. They are models of faith for us. Their witness reminds us that saints-in-the-making (such as we are) can love their enemies and win them to Christ. This too is how we make a difference.

Let us not forget how Ruth and Boaz stayed true to God in all their choices. So it must be for us. You and I make a difference.