

Sermon

“Daughters of Promise - Women of Faith”

A Sermon for First Presbyterian Church

Sunday, November 3, 2019

Kirkin' - 2019

Ruth 1:1 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. 2 The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion; they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. 3 But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. 4 These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. When they had lived there about ten years, 5 both Mahlon and Chilion also died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

Ruth 1:6 Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD had considered his people and given them food. 7 So she set out from the place where she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way 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. 9 The LORD grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband.” Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud. 10 They said to her, “No, we will return with you to your people.” 11 But Naomi said, “Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? 12 Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, 13 would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the LORD has turned against me.” 14 Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

Ruth 1:15 So she said, “See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.” 16 But 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.*

*17 Where you die, I will die—
there will I be buried.*

*May the LORD do thus and so to me,
and more as well,*

if even death parts me from you!”

18 When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

Luke 7:36 One of the Pharisees asked Jesus to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee’s house and took his place at the table. 37 And a woman in the city, who was a sinner; having learned that he was eating in the Pharisee’s house, brought an alabaster jar of ointment. 38 She stood behind him at his feet, weeping, and began to bathe his feet with her tears and to dry them with her hair. Then she continued kissing his feet and anointing them with the ointment. 39 Now when the Pharisee who had invited him saw it, he said to himself, “If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what kind of woman this is who is touching him—that she is a sinner.” 40 Jesus spoke up and said to him, “Simon, I have something to say to you.” “Teacher,” he replied, “Speak.” 41 “A certain creditor had two debtors; one owed five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42 When they could not pay, he canceled the debts for both of them. Now which of them will love him more?” 43 Simon answered, “I suppose the one for whom he canceled the greater debt.” And Jesus said to him, “You have judged rightly.” 44 Then turning toward the woman, he said to Simon, “Do you see this woman? I entered your house; you gave me no water for my feet, but she has bathed my feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. 45 You gave me no kiss, but from the time I came in she has not stopped kissing my feet. 46 You did not anoint my head with oil, but she has anointed my feet with ointment. 47 Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence

she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little.”
48 *Then he said to her, “Your sins are forgiven.”* 49 *But those who were at the table with him began to say among themselves, “Who is this who even forgives sins?”* 50 *And he said to the woman, “Your faith has saved you; go in peace.”*

I. The Bible as a manual for social disobedience —

A. It is true that much of the Biblical witness seems to support a male-dominated and male-privileged sort of narrative.

1. The stories appear to mostly be driven by the lives and quests of the men:

Adam, Cain & Able, Noah

**Abraham, Isaac, Jacob & Esau, Joseph
Pharaoh**

B. But if you start to pay attention — the text seems to be *always* also working a clever sub-narrative about where the true faithfulness is found.

1. Eve is the one who is curious and clever

2. Sarah, Rachael, Leah, and other wives routinely arrange things behind the scenes and show that their husbands are not nearly as clever as they imagine.

3. In the beginning of Exodus when the most powerful man on earth (Pharaoh) decrees that the nation should commit infanticide in an effort to cull the slave population —

a. Two peasant mid-wives Shiphrah and Puah

b. And Pharaoh’s own daughter and wife refuse to enact the legislation and the

**baby Moses not only escapes with his life
but is raised up in Pharaoh's own home.**

4. The new testament is no different.

a. Jesus' disciples: Mary, Joanna, Susanna

**b. Think of all the women mentioned by the
apostle Paul as collaborators with him in
the building of the infant church:**

Priscilla (Romans)

Mary, Persis, Julia, Nereus,

Phoebe (near Corinth)

Junia - *the apostle*

Chloe (Corinth)

Euodia & Syntyche (Philippians)

**C. It is from the mouths of Hannah, Miriam, and
Mother Mary that the radical rearranging of the
Kingdom of God is announced". In Mary's words:**

"My soul magnifies the Lord,

47 *and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,*

48 *for he has looked with favor on the lowliness of his servant.*

Surely, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

49 *for the Mighty One has done great things for me,*

and holy is his name.

50 *His mercy is for those who fear him*

from generation to generation.

51 *He has shown strength with his arm;*

he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts.

52 *He has brought down the powerful from their thrones,*

and lifted up the lowly;

53 *he has filled the hungry with good things,*

and sent the rich away empty.

54 *He has helped his servant Israel,*

in remembrance of his mercy,

55 *according to the promise he made to our ancestors,*

to Abraham and to his descendants forever.”

- D. While is it true that *men* have long used the biblical witness to try to keep women in their place — it is nevertheless *also* true the the very text the men thought was on their side is a powerful manual for social transformation to anyone who is paying attention to its content.**

II. Today we have just two of the rather extraordinary texts about women from scripture.

- A. The story of the book of Ruth with the terrible calamities and hardships experienced by Naomi and her daughters-in-law is a powerful witness about self-sacrificing tenacious love.**

- 1. Ruth’s poetic and passionate fidelity to Naomi has rightly been recognized down through the ages of faith as a fitting example of the love between two people who belong to one another.**

- a. It would likely have been expedient and probably better for Ruth to leave her mother-in-law to fend for herself in her old age. But Ruth shows remarkable fidelity in saying:**

*“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.
17 Where you die, I will die—
there will I be buried.*

B. And Luke's text, yet again, is a story which appears to be about a righteous *man* and turns out to be a story about a faithful *woman*.

1. It comes in the form of a story about the nature of God's *righteousness*.

Simon: Thinks that God's righteousness consists in the fact that God cannot tolerate sinners. For Simon, salvation consists in separating sinners from the elect. Therefore, he is: A) disappointed in Jesus for not knowing the woman was a sinner, B) concerned that a sinner was allowed to be present in such a dramatic way.

Jesus: has already said in Luke 6:35 that God's righteousness consists in the fact that God "is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." For Jesus *unrighteousness* consists in:

† contempt of self

† contempt for others

† contempt for God

....all of which lead to a lack of graciousness toward others.

III. Today we are celebrating the Kirkin' O' the Tartan

A. A recognition of the Scottish heritage for our stream of Christendom.

B. Much of the Christian history of Scotland is told around the ministry and mission of such great saints as:

1. Columba (Iona)

2. Aidan (Lindisfarne)

3. Cuthbert (Lindisfarne at time of reorientation to Roman Christian practices)

C. But there were great women of faith too!

IV. Hilda — [notes from the Peregrination Primer 2019]

Hilda [or Hild] of Whitby (c. 614–680) was baptised with her uncle, King Edwin, when she was 13 years old by Paulinus, the first bishop of Northumbria. She became a nun when she was 33 years old. She intended to go to Gaul to become a nun but Aidan asked her to stay in Northumbria. She lived to age 66 so she spent 33 years as secular and 33 years as a servant of God. Hilda's dual monasteries and school at Whitby produced five bishops. At the Synod of Whitby, she stood with the Celtic delegation. Aidan died in 651 and the synod was 664. She was raised under the Roman influence and changed to the Celtic beliefs perhaps because of the influence of Saint Aidan.

Called “Mother” by all who sought her counsel, Hilda was renowned for her wisdom, devotion, and grace in giving direction.¹ St. Bede further lists her virtues as: justice, devotion, chastity, peace, and love.

Hilda would suffer from a persistent illness for six years she was attacked by a burning fever which she understood to be the Lord's way of making her perfect through weakness (see II Corinthians 12:7-9). Through all these years, Bede reports, that Hilda never ceased to praise God and thus to be an example “to serve God obediently when in health, and to render thanks to him faithfully when in trouble or bodily weakness.”²

V. Saint Margaret — [notes from the Peregrination Primer 2019]

Born: 1047 — Died: 1093 Canonized: 1250

In reading Turgot's *Life of Saint Margaret* we learn that when the beautiful Margaret was a young princess she was fleeing from The Norman invasion in Saxony (her home) when she was shipwrecked off the coast of Scotland. She and her entourage were “rescued” by the barbarian king Malcolm (think of Shakespear's *MacBeth*). Within a year he had taken her as his bride. She bore him eight children, and raised them well. She died at age 46. We have every reason to believe that Margaret's deep devotion to God and daily acts of piety (she faithfully prayed the Daily Offices) and mercy (she was a well-loved benefactor of the poor), did much to bring Christianity to the court and country controlled by Malcolm. When in 1250 she was canonized as a Saint of the church, it must be noted that she was one of the very few female Saints who was neither a virgin nor a widow. She was a *mother*.

Throughout her life Margaret attended to charitable works, serving orphans and the poor every day before she ate, and washing the feet of the poor in imitation of Christ. She kept Vigil, nightly arising at midnight to pray.

Margaret also instigated the restoration of the monastery at Iona in 1072. She is also known to have been an intercessor for the release of fellow English exiles, forced into serfdom by conquest. In her private life, Margaret was as devout as she was in her public duties, spending much of her time in prayer and devotional reading.

I am certain that Margaret did not dream of being wed to an illiterate barbarian King, but her new circumstance, as unexpected as it was, also provided new possibilities for her to live out her vocation as a child of God. She became, in the very best sense of the word, an Apostle to the people of Malcolm's kingdom and a great benefactor of the companions of God throughout the region.

¹ see *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* by Bede, pp.243-247. (London: Penguin Classics, 1990).

² Bede, *ibid* p. 246.

VI. No doubt we all know of present-day Daughters of promise, Women of Faith.

- A. The anthem by that title was commissioned by my brother Steve and his wife Debbie in honor and loving memory of two great women of faith (Rita Lang and Lila Odom).**
- B. No doubt you too can name the women of faith who have taught you about the love of God and the nature of God's mercy-centered righteousness.**
- C. So let us give thanks for:**
 - 1. Shiphrah and Puah**
 - 2. Hannah, Miriam & Ruth**
 - 3. Mother Mary**
 - 4. Phoebe, Chloe & Euodia**
 - 5. Hilde & Margaret**

And indeed, for *all* the

Daughters of Promise — Women of Faith!