



Sermon Growth Guide

September 3, 2023

Displaced

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Lead Me Home - Displaced

Ruth 1:8-18

Key Verse: Ruth 1:16b-1:17a

“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.”

Big Idea: Jesus as the ultimate redeemer who offers true belonging and fulfillment.



Foundations

We know that we were created for something different, that we fell into sin, that we pulled away from God and pursued our own desires which leaves us in a state of being “un-homed.” We have become wanderers in a foreign land who long for our true home!

That’s Ruth’s story as well. We know from the Scriptures that Ruth became a stranger in a foreign land as she commits herself to Naomi. Together these two women navigate a painful and challenging season of life. Unable to save themselves, they are reliant on a Kinsman Redeemer to save them. Eventually, Ruth is welcomed into the family she was always supposed to join, the land where she was always supposed to dwell. Boaz is the Kinsman Redeemer for Ruth and Naomi, but the true Redeemer of the displaced is Jesus. We find our true home in the Lord.

Some of us will relate with Ruth this week, finding ourselves in a season of searching for home, for something deeper. Many of us already know the Lord. We’ve already placed our hope in the ultimate Redeemer. The question, then, for us is to consider, “Who am I bringing along with me?” Just as Naomi brought Ruth back to her homeland and encouraged her pursuit of Boaz, we are called to help others meet the true Redeemer. Who has the Lord placed in your path?

Understanding God’s Word

Together, read Ruth 1:8-18.

What do you think is going on here? What inspires Ruth to remain with Naomi?

Have you encountered situations where people seemed drawn to a community of faith even before fully embracing its beliefs? How was that similar or different to your own experience of coming to faith in Christ? Did you start with believing? Behaving? Belonging?

Applying God’s Word

Ruth eventually encounters Boaz and is reliant on his role as the “kinsman redeemer” for survival. What parallels exist between Ruth/Boaz’s situation and our own situation with Jesus?

Ruth sees something in Naomi that she couldn’t bear to lose. Even on Naomi’s worst day, she is still representing the Lord to Ruth. What steps do you take to ensure your life is consistently reflecting the love of Jesus to those around you?

Witnessing God’s Word

The Good News Initiative question for the week is: “Have you ever wondered if there’s more to life than this?” How are you doing with these questions/statements? Have you been able to initiate good discussions with others in your life?

How are you serving as a “Naomi” for someone else? Who are you bringing along with you in your pursuit of the Lord?

Hey I'm Greg, one of the pastors here at First Pres. My parents live out in northwest Indiana. We head out that direction each summer to visit and we like to road-trip. We usually split the trip into two days. I wake the kids up at the crack of dawn, load into a car, drive for 10-12 hours, and then pull off into some road-side motel outside of Des Moines or something. I'll tell you what, after some serious time on the road, the cheapest motel room you can find can offer some serious relief right? But it's always a bit "off" you know? The pillows are always a little too deflated/squishy, the water pressure in the shower usually leaves a lot to be desired, the bed is lumpy, you can usually hear the people above you or next to you watching tv or talking until waaaay to late into the night. Don't get me wrong... it certainly beats sleeping in the car with two kids and a dog, but it ain't home! It's more like a substitute home. A place that reminds you of what real home is like. But you wouldn't really want to end up there permanently.

I wonder if sometimes we can find ourselves stuck in "substitute homes" in more significant/serious ways in our lives. C.S. Lewis suggested this in one of his writings: "Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased."

Mud pies and roadside motels. Do you have some of these in your life? Are you settling for distractions and substitutes when the Lord has so much more to offer? We've been going through this series together, **Lead Me Home**. We know that, because of the sin in the world and in our hearts, we have a bottomless pit of desire in us that the world is unable to fill. We all hunger for bread that truly satisfies, for water that quenches, for a sense of ultimate belonging, for our True Home. We get a snapshot of this hunger in the Old Testament with Ruth.

You may remember, Ruth grew up in Moab (just east of Israel) and ends up marrying a Jewish guy! His family had left their home in Bethlehem and moved to Moab because

of a famine. Because of that, Ruth found a home with a good man and a loving family. The family was in Moab for nearly 10 years when more disaster struck. Not only had Ruth's father-in-law died, but her husband and brother-in-law died suddenly as well. Ruth was left alone with her mother-in-law, Naomi, and sister-in-law, Orpah (not to be confused with a famous TV show host...). Ruth had a sense of how her life was going to/supposed to work out, but now her plans were completely out the window. Maybe you've been there sometime in your life? Maybe you're there right now?

Well, in this era, the loss of the men was especially devastating. Not only was there the obvious grief, but these women were now alone in the world. They're without the support of a man in a patriarchal society. So, Naomi prepares to head back to her homeland. There's clearly nothing left for her in Moab and she's heard that the famine in Israel has ended, so she packs up and starts out on the road to Bethlehem. But before she's too far out of town she pauses for a conversation with Ruth and Orpah: read Ruth 1:8-18.

We can see that Ruth has no prospects with Naomi, no promise of a full life, no hope for a new love story. In fact, Ruth is guaranteed to experience harassment and persecution in Israel because of her Moabite heritage! Naomi knows this and urges both women to return to their "Mother's home." That's noteworthy. Rather than going to the home of their fathers, they're told to go to their mothers. In the ancient world, marriages were often arranged in the mother's bedroom. Naomi is telling them to go back home to try to remarry! That's their only hope in this world!

Orpah, the sister-in-law, finally relents. She agrees to Naomi's request and turns back towards home. Orpah does the responsible thing, the sensible thing. Naomi says to Ruth, "She's returning to her people AND HER GODS. Go back with her!" Ruth and Orpah grew up worshipping the Moabite deity, Chemosh. They have homes to return to. A god that they've worshipped their whole life. A false god, but still there's a family and a culture waiting for Ruth. She has a home.

But she decides to throw all of that away, she leaves her home and her life behind and

clings to Naomi! Why!? Why would Ruth do this?!

Alan Kreider wrote a small book about conversion in the early church. It asks, "What did it mean for a person to BECOME a Christian in the early church? How was it that early church brought in new followers of Jesus?" Kreider highlights three pieces of the puzzle noting that early church was known for its belief, behavior, and belonging.

Beliefs – They put their faith in Jesus and His teaching, they learned the creeds of the church, etc.

Behavior – Christians in the Roman Empire lived radically different lives than their neighbors. The practice of infanticide was common in the ancient world (leaving a child to die because of undesired sex, disability, etc.). But Christians would go out and collect these abandoned infants. They were known for adopting unwanted children. Christians were also known for caring for the sick. They stayed in cities during the plagues to assist the dying while the wealthy Romans moved out to the countryside to save themselves. They were known for generosity and care.

Belonging – Neighbors were invited to join in the daily lives of the early church. We could say that there weren't really any privacy fences! In the ancient world people lived on top of one another in cities. So, the churches would have been singing and worshipping and living out their lives together and it would have been impossible to miss!

Somehow a mix of belonging and radical behavior often led to belief. Many of you know we run a course throughout the year called, "Alpha." It's a chance for spiritual seekers to consider faith in Jesus in a hospitable and fun environment, wrestling with questions like, "Could God exist?" "Who is Jesus?" "What is the Bible?" One of my favorite quotes from an Alpha guest came a few years ago. After 7 or 8 weeks this woman told her group, "You know I'm an atheist, so I know all of this Jesus stuff is B.S., but there's something different about you people. I can't quite put my finger on it, but I like you guys, and you seem to like me! There's just something different about you..." The group host and I laughed later saying, "Yeah there's something different!! It's all that Jesus stuff!"

Why does Ruth give up everything to cling to Naomi? Here's what I think: Ruth marries into this Jewish family and catches a glimpse of what following the Lord is all about. She gets a taste of belonging to the people of God. Naomi offers Ruth a sense of hope, a sense of HOME greater than anything she has experienced before. I think Ruth finds something in Naomi that she cannot bear to lose. And, apparently, even on Naomi's worst day (v13), she's still representing the Lord to Ruth. There's still something that Ruth can't let go of (v14).

Maybe that's why you're here today. Maybe you've caught a whiff of something and are longing for more. Maybe you're sick of finding yourself in road-side motels. Maybe you're curious about what it is that we're doing here at the corner of Nevada/Bijou, why does this community gather week after week? Well, I can tell you, it's because of Jesus.

In verse 16, Ruth declares her commitment to Naomi. She says, "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 1:16b-17a

Ruth is committing herself to Naomi, to her people, to the one true God of Israel. Ruth surrenders her old home, she surrenders any hope of a normal life, any sense of stability, and willingly becomes a stranger in a foreign land in order to stay with Naomi. But, as we know from the rest of the story, it's not Naomi that Ruth REALLY needs. As the women return to Bethlehem, they are in dire straits. Really, prostitution is one of the only options available to them as widows without families. Other than that, there's just this ancient Jewish practice commanded in Leviticus where farmers are supposed to leave the grain on the edge of their fields behind so that orphans, widows, and foreigners can come along and collect the leftovers. It was a way that God guaranteed the marginalized were being provided for in the regular practices of the people. So, that's how Ruth and Naomi survive. Ruth, a foreigner in a strange land, is at the mercy of the landowners. And really that's how the story could have continued: Ruth going out each day to try to collect scraps on the sides of fields. Because Ruth is completely given over to a life of poverty unless someone

steps in to save her.

Ruth can't save herself from her physical situation any more than we can save ourselves from our spiritual situation.

But here's what happens: Ruth meets a landowner named Boaz who, frankly, is a stud. He's kind, well established in the community, responsible and respected. Boaz takes notice of Ruth. And not her physical appearance, there's no mention of that, he notices her character. Word of how Ruth left everything to care for Naomi has gotten around (Ruth 2:11). Because of this, Boaz shows Ruth favor and ensures she returns home to Naomi safe and with plenty of food. When Ruth returns home, Naomi is over-the-moon because, Boaz is apparently a relative of Naomi's husband and he's in a position to take over Naomi's husband's estate! Boaz is what is known as a "kinsman-redeemer" or in newer translations, a "guardian-redeemer." The idea here is that Boaz could pay whatever debts are owed, and then take control of the family farm and help continue Naomi's family legacy. And that's exactly what happens.

Boaz REDEEMS the land that belonged to Naomi's husband, and in doing so, assumes responsibility for Ruth and takes her to be his wife. Boaz redeems, protects, provides for Naomi and Ruth, but that's just a foretaste of the ultimate redemption that will come generations later. See, Ruth and Boaz have a baby, and name him Obed. Obed, we learn, is the grandfather of David, Israel's great king. And it's through that same lineage that the Messiah is to come.

Friends, the story of Ruth is the story of a foreigner who finds a home in the people of God. And she's brought in so closely that she becomes the great-grandmother of King David, and the great-great-etc. grandmother of Jesus, who makes a Home for us!

At the beginning of the story, Ruth thought she needed Naomi. But it's not Naomi, or "Bethlehem," or even Boaz that Ruth really needs. It's the Lord. What Boaz does for Ruth in her temporary physical situation is what Jesus does for all of us in our eternal, spiritual situation. Jesus is the true kinsman-redeemer, the ultimate guardian-redeemer. Jesus offers us TRUE belonging, FULL life, HOME.

So, what are we to do with this? I think there are a few options:

1a) Maybe you're here today feeling a bit like Ruth. Maybe you find yourself aching and seeking for something more, something deeper, something REAL. But you just keep settling for roadside motels. Cheap substitutes. You can keep distracting yourself with those. You can keep playing with "drink and sex and ambition..." but it's never going to fill you. You'll continue to hunger for bread that satisfies. Maybe you should join us for the Alpha course that starts this Thursday. You can start exploring faith alongside others!

1b) OR, you can set those lesser-things aside today. Jesus stands before you offering life and belonging. You can trust Him today; you can give your life over to Him today and know His peace.

After the service we'll have prayer-team with read cards on lanyards. They'd be honored to talk and pray with you, to help you say, "Yes" to Jesus.

OR

2) Maybe today you already know that your True Home is with the Lord. You already know the Redeemer. So, let me challenge you with this question: Who are you being a Naomi for? Who is watching you, who is getting a glimpse of kingdom life in you, and saying, "I want that!?" Pastor Tim has been equipping us each week with "Spiritual Conversation Starters" or "Good News Initiatives." There will be another card at the door as you exit.

This week, I challenge you to ask someone, "Have you ever wondered if there's more to life than this?" That's the question we're wrestling with in Alpha this Thursday night. Maybe ask someone in your life that question and then invite them to come with you to Alpha! (Details and RSVP on our website, firstprescos.org/tryalpha)

Dear ones, we know the redeemer, we know there is a home beyond this one. We can be a people who represent "HOME" to a lost and searching world as Naomi represented it to Ruth.

Let us not miss the opportunity!