November 11, 2018

Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17

Through the Eyes of Greenland Hills

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Greenland Hills United Methodist Church

Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17 New Revised Standard Version

Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, “My daughter, I need to seek some security for you, so that it may be well with you. Now here is our kinsman Boaz, with whose young women you have been working. See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. Now wash and anoint yourself, and put on your best clothes and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, observe the place where he lies; then, go and uncover his feet and lie down; and he will tell you what to do.” She said to her, “All that you tell me I will do.”

So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When they came together, the Lord made her conceive, and she bore a son. Then the women said to Naomi, “Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without next-of-kin; and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him.” Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom, and became his nurse. The women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi.” They named him Obed; he became the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Seventy-seven years ago a community of faith gathered and began to worship. It was a month before Pearl Harbor and that group of 87 Christians had no idea how their worlds would be turned upside down in the next few years. In 1942 they purchased this land. They continued to worship every Sunday at the local elementary school and in 1946 they broke ground on this building. Seventy-seven years later we host eleven Narcotics Anonymous meetings a week, ten Kindermusik classes, and fifty children attend Greenland Hills Preschool. Seventy-seven years later our building is filled with Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, the Singapore Slingers band rehearsal, and this fall we started hosting adult violin lessons supporting the Ubuntu violin children’s ministry at Zaragoza elementary school. Over the past five years, 100% of the Ubuntu students have been accepted into the magnet junior high changing the trajectory of their lives.

We are a church that focuses outside of itself. We have Kids in Mission the last Sunday of the month so our children can see how important helping others is to our faith and to our lives. We build homes in Juarez with Proyecto Abrigo every January. We have All-Church mission trips where children, youth, and adults can serve together. We partner with Emanuel Community Center and many folks here volunteer with their food pantry on Tuesdays. At our Global Village Market, we have raised over $350,000 in twelve years for nonprofits around the world.

We are a church that desires that weddings of all couples be hosted and celebrated here. We are a church that believes in justice and human rights as we have partnered this year with Faith in Texas, a multi-racial, multi-faith movement developing civic leadership in faith communities for economic and racial justice. We have a Justice Team that is on a listening campaign to find what systemic problem affects our community. Once identified, we want to move our entire church to action through a policy campaign.

We are a church that creates beautiful worship to God through our music. We gather together as a family of faith, as Robert Edwards says in his song, “The Aspen Tree,” “joined together with our hearts raised high above, we honor God and magnify God's love.” We give thanks for our Chancel Choir that helps us praise God.

As we worship together today we hear a story about Ruth and Naomi, a young woman and her mother-in-law who both experienced grief in the death of their husbands. Things were different during the time of Ruth and Naomi than they are today. Back then widows had no way to support themselves outside of finding a male partner to support them. Cultural norms would have dictated that a family member, most often the brother of the deceased man, would be obligated to marry the widow. She would then be expected to bear a male child to carry on the family lineage.

At each step of Ruth’s journey, she took risk. She was a foreign widow, unknown to her new community. She goes looking for leftover food in a field of a person she does not know, hoping that the owner will be sympathetic to a woman who is hungry. It was a difficult way to try and survive, but Ruth had no choice. Boaz welcomes Ruth in his field, assuring her his protection, and inviting her to water and lunch with his employees. That morning she was a nobody, but she took a risk and was greeted with hospitality.

Naomi realizes that Boaz is a distant relative and she has a plan to entrap him in marriage. READ SCRIPTURE.

Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, “My daughter, I need to seek some security for you, so that it may be well with you. Now here is our kinsman Boaz, with whose young women you have been working. See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. Now wash and anoint yourself, and put on your best clothes and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, observe the place where he lies; then, go and uncover his feet and lie down; and he will tell you what to do.” She said to her, “All that you tell me I will do.”

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Ruth does everything Naomi asks of her, the dress, the hiding, the sneaking, the uncovering, but when Boaz is startled awake and shouts, “Who are you?” Ruth tells Boaz, “spread your cloak over your companion, because you are next of kin” (Ruth 3:9). She takes a great risk by asking him to marry her!

The story ends with the neighborhood women telling Naomi that Ruth loves her and that she is worth more than seven sons. This is the only time the word love is used, and it refers to Ruth’s love for Naomi.

Sometimes risk is required for the social order to be changed. I think of women who pursued knowledge and education even though they were discouraged and, in some cases, refused admission from most institutions of higher learning. I think of the women who refused to keep silent on issues like voting rights and the ordination of women in the United Methodist Church. I think of the women who tirelessly fought for the full ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment, even as I continue to wonder why it was never passed.[[1]](#footnote-1)

One of the risks that we can take in our world today is to feel. Feelings are our superpower. They compel us to act. The shock and grief and joy we feel become the hammer and nails we use to build a better world.[[2]](#footnote-2) 311 days in 2018 and 307 mass shootings. On Thursday I felt so hopeless. I can’t change anything. I can’t make a difference. I can’t stop it. When we get resigned to gun violence, we stop feeling. May we risk having feelings so we act. At 11:00 a.m. on November 11th, 1918, the armistice went into effect ending the fighting of World War I. On the 100th anniversary of that day, I know that we can work together toward real solutions that reduce gun violence.

A church is a funny creation. When we open our doors, we want everyone to come. I remember visiting a friend’s church for her daughter’s baptism and the usher told me, “Get on in here!” I was a little taken aback, but we want people to come to this place. Being a part of a church is risky because you become friends with people that are different than you, but that love you simply because you are you. To seek out community is risky.

Ruth took the risk of seeking out community and she found hope for the future. Are we willing to take a risk of seeking out community? Ruth created a family of belonging. We do the same here in the church. We look out for one another, we notice when someone is gone, we champion people’s successes, and we cry with one another. Belonging to a church community is about taking care of one another, it is about providing a safe place for everyone, and it is about sharing love with one another.

Being a part of a church family means we have to be open and vulnerable with one another. It means we have to risk. We have to lift up the ways we are similar instead of focusing on our differences. We have to see how God is in each one of us and how God connects us all. We have chosen this faith family so we can grow in our faith and feel the love of God. What will we risk to show the love of God? What will we risk because of our faith? Are we willing to commit to taking a risk in opening ourselves up to God, to our fellow church members, to our neighbors? I hope that we continue to risk as a church family for 77 more years! Thanks be to God, Amen.

1. This paragraph taken from: https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/preaching-notes-for-twenty-fourth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-b [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. https://www.facebook.com/amandaejohnson/posts/10105373111393491 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)