

New Kilpatrick

Sermon

12th August 2018

Ruth 4:1-17

Spirit... because you can... and we can't... bring the colour back into the words of scripture... the stories of faith... the people of the covenant... that we might see ourselves... clearly... right there... where the colours dance... in the heart of your vision... Spirit... inspire... So be it...

This has been results week for those sitting National Fives and Highers etc... Let me rephrase that... This has been stress week for parents and teachers across the country...

Seeing some of Scottish pupils receive their results on TV this week... getting that live reaction... brought back dark memories of when I got my first set of higher results... and have been trying to bury for decades... Now-a-days you get them by text between 8am and 8.05 in the morning... except everyone has been up since five... pacing... checking their phones are charged...

In our day... I remember grabbing the brown envelope... from the Postie that morning... (Yup, it was the time post arrived at breakfast time)... The Postie had seen a lot of worried faces already that morning... I opened mine... yanked out the certificate... not knowing where to look... my eyes swirling across the page... searching for the single letter 'A'..... nope... couldn't find any... So I then tried looking for any 'B's... Ah there's one... O... there's only one...

Then panic began to set in... That means there must be a few 'C's... O yes... there's one... O... there's only one of them as well... "Hey mum"... I shouted... "can you believe it... they've forgotten to put my English mark on the certificate!"...

And then it slowly dawned... was possible I had failed my English?... Normally they would give you a compensatory O'grade... at least if you were in band 'D'... but English wasn't mentioned at all... I looked on the back of the certificate to see if it was hiding on the other side... but that was just blank...

The reality was... I had failed my english so spectacularly... the SQA decided we should all just keep quiet about it... and nothing is mentioned on my certificate...

And I tell that story... to go along with quite a number of stories this week... of people who in the past did not get the grades they needed... but survived... Indeed, more than survived... positively flourished... by *not* defining themselves by their results... finding other opportunities... different routes from the typical ones... to achieve great careers... good qualifications... and fulfilled lives...

And so... huge congratulations to those who achieved the results they needed this week... You are fabulous... no one can take that away from you... It is a great feeling... Enjoy every moment of what you have achieved...

Equally... those who didn't get all they needed... congratulations on what you did achieve... Appreciate those grades... there is nothing minor in what you did... Don't let anyone define you or limit you by a rogue result...

There is no wrong path... Everyone learns in different ways... and takes different routes...

And if you ever wanted to be encouraged in that... that story is as old as the bible itself... which dedicates a multiplicity of stories of folk... who discover there is no wrong path... Shall I name but a few... Jacob... who stole a birthright... and fought with the dark angel... went on to found Israel... Moses... who was brought up Egyptian... went on to become the liberator of the Hebrew nation... Paul... persecutor of the church... went on to become its greatest evangelist... Joseph... the dreamer... became the governor of Egypt and fed half the known world... and last... but absolutely not least... Ruth... who has a whole book dedicated to her... telling us... there is no wrong path...

Lets just remind ourselves... of her route to the kingdom... A Moabite... married into a Judean family... who had been migrants in Moab... becoming a widow... along with her sister-in-law and mother-in-law... travelling with her mother-in-law... making *herself* a refugee now in Judea... finding herself gleaning wheat from the edge of the field to survive... with no security or support... discovering her mother-in-law's distant next of kind didn't want them... and finally Boaz... through a scheme concocted up by Naomi... finally marrying... and bearing a son...

No wrong path... But O... so many would say this was exactly the wrong path... because this woman... this foreign pagan... the grandmother of King David... was not pure blood...

But the truth is that we don't get David or Jesus... without this outsider... and while the story of Ruth doesn't deny she was the grandmother of David... the way the story is told... you'd have thought Naomi was the mother...

This book... called "Ruth"... oddly ends up being more about Naomi... the Israelite... Ruth fades in importance a bit... and the women of Bethlehem declare... "Naomi has a son"... as if the community has a problem with an outsider being the saviour of the nation... David... the grandson becomes Israel's greatest king... but Israel itself could not produce that heir...

While the community might have an issue with this... God does not... That's the point... There is no wrong path in the life of God... Future and possibility... come from all sorts of angles and directions... for grace and hope are unconditional...

It is a theme we continually have to repeat... that God is not defined by one set of rules... one faith... one denomination... one culture... God is not a Christian... a Jew... a Muslim... there are many paths...

But there is a significant consequence to this we need to consider:... the person you have known as your enemy... might just be your salvation... There will come a day when your future depends on the one you are prejudice towards...

Ruth is such a person... a Moabite who redeems the enemy Israel by her strength of character... her chessed... loving kindness... a word we explored a couple of weeks ago... Israel is given a future through one who was an enemy...

But the bible does not limit that insight to just one story... Among others is our favourite parable... the Good Samaritan... When the story was told to Jewish peasants... no one would identify themselves with their enemy the Samaritan... rather they would see themselves as the beaten up man... so the deeper insight of that story is... that your enemy... one day... could be your salvation... so now... how will you live with those you deem different... or less than you?...

The Bible does not hesitate to show there is no wrong path... God more often than not... takes the atypical route... with atypical people... who have taken very different paths...

paths we are unsure of and unfamiliar with... to create a kingdom... a little more chaotic... than the one we'd rather have that is defined and controlled and regulated...

It is moving... to find Ruth in the Bible... who walked a different path... as a stranger and outsider... who refused to walk away from another person's troubles... It is a linchpin to the whole future of a nation...

This is God's kingdom... the community we shape in God's name... In the church we culture and envision and love... there is no wrong path... Ruth in particular... shows us that grace is wide... and our future might depend on those we turn into enemies...

Let us not be defined by one way... one denomination... one way of doing things... The Bible offers us the truth... that God takes a plethora of unexpected... unusual... paths... that lead to the reshaping... renewing... and redeeming... of this world...

References

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Horizons in Biblical Theology 33 (2011) 62-81
- Jonathan Sacks Lifting others, we ourselves are lifted
<http://rabbisacks.org/lifting-others-we-ourselves-are-lifted/>