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July 6th: Ruth 1 & 1 Corinthians 6

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Alastair Roberts

Naomi returns to Bethlehem. Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

Ruth, Chapter 1 In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. And a man of Bethlehem and Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech, and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Malon and Kilion.

They were Ephraohites from Bethlehem and Judah. They went into the country of Moab, and remained there. But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons.

These took Moabite wives. The name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years, and both Malon and Kilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab. For she

had heard in the fields of Moab that the Lord had visited his people and given them food. So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah.

But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, Go, return, each of you to her mother's house. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The Lord grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband.

Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept. And they said to her, No, we will return with you to your people. But Naomi said, Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb, that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband.

If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, would you therefore wait till they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter for me for your sake that the hand of the Lord has gone out against me. Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

And she said, See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods. Return after your sister-in-law. But Ruth said, Do not urge me to leave you, or to return from following you.

For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your guard my guard. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried.

May the Lord do so to me, and more also, if anything but death parts me from you. And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more. So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem.

And when they came to Bethlehem the whole town was stirred because of them. And the women said, Is this Naomi? She said to them, Do not call me Naomi, call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the Lord has brought me back empty.

Why call me Naomi, when the Lord has testified against me, and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me? So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest. The story of Ruth is an unusual one.

It is set in the time of the judges, but it starkly contrasts with what we find in that book. There are no great battles or military heroes. There is no real focus upon the political situation.

And it seems as if the larger state of the nation has fallen away from view. In its place we

have a quiet story of faithfulness in an unexpected person, and in a person of seemingly little account. But yet when we look closer at this story we see some great themes converging in it, and there are ways to read it against other stories that will prove illuminating, something that will become more apparent as we go through it.

We could read it against the backdrop of the story of the judges. This is faithfulness in a dark time. It should also be read against the devastating events at the end of that book.

It could be read against the backdrop of Deuteronomy. Certain of the laws of Deuteronomy come into play here, the gleaning laws, the levirate commandments, and also the place of the Moabite in the congregation. And we see here that the law can serve a redemptive purpose.

It can bring wholeness in a situation where there was once brokenness. It can be read against the backdrop of Genesis. Broken threads within the story of Genesis are tied together by God many centuries later.

The story of Lot and Sodom is in the background here, leaving a place of death, the loss of two sons-in-law, and two daughters who want to have offspring. Ruth of course is a descendant of one of those daughters of Lot. There's also the story of Judah and Tamar, once again two sons dying at the beginning and a widow who seeks a levirate marriage and many of the same themes emerging there.

Boaz of course is a descendant of Judah. We might also notice the important ten generation pattern that we find in Genesis, from the story of Cain and Abel to the story of Noah, from the story of Noah to Abraham, from Abraham to Boaz and Ruth. The story of Cain and Abel is a story of a dead brother and another brother taking his place, Seth taking the place of Abel.

The story of Noah is the story of three brothers and one brother who is judged, Ham and his son Canaan. The story of Abraham is a story of a dead brother too, and two other brothers stepping in to raise up seed for that dead brother. The fact that many similar themes occur ten generations later should not surprise us.

These old stories are playing out in the background of the story of Ruth. What may seem to us at first glance to be a story of an out of the way place, with a woman of little account, is the story of some great themes of redemptive history coming to a new expression. Of course we can also read the story of Ruth as part of the backdrop to 1 Samuel.

In Ruth we take a crucial step towards the birth of David. The story starts with a famine and a man from Bethlehem who goes to sojourn in the land of Moab with his two sons, Malon and Cilion, and his wife Naomi. The story is introduced as the story of a man, but the man dies in the third verse.

Elimelech, however, is an important part of the story. The women will be raising up seed for this dead man. This story is a story of resurrection.

It's reminiscent of Abraham's sojourn in Egypt during the famine as well, but they are tarrying and settling there. And it's ironic that they go from Bethlehem. Bethlehem is the house of bread.

Elimelech dies and Malon and Cilion take Moabite wives. They seem to be intermarrying and assimilating with the Moabites. In chapter 4 verse 10 we discover that Ruth married Malon, which presumably means that Orpah married Cilion.

Naomi is settling outside of the promised land among the Moabites, where they should not be. The language used for settling here is the same expression as we find in Genesis chapter 11 on two occasions. And as people migrated from the east, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there in verse 2. And then in verse 31, Terah took Abram his son and Lath the son of Haran his grandson and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife.

And they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan. But when they came to Haran, they settled there. In both of these cases, the expression is ominous.

In Terah's case there is a settling short of the land. Abram has to leave and move to Canaan. Reading that wider passage in Genesis chapter 11 verses 27 to 32, we can see more similarities.

Now these are the generations of Terah. Terah fathered Abraham, Nahor and Haran and Haran fathered Lath. Haran died in the presence of his father Terah in the land of his kindred in Ur of the Chaldeans.

And Abram and Nahor took wives. The name of Abram's wife was Sarai and the name of Nahor's wife Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah and Iscah. Now Sarai was barren.

She had no child. Terah took Abram his son and Lath the son of Haran his grandson and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife. And they went forth together from Ur of the Chaldeans to go into the land of Canaan.

But when they came to Haran they settled there. The days of Terah were 205 years and Terah died in Haran. There's an older barren woman.

There's dead men. There's the practice of leveret marriage as Nahor takes the daughter of his dead brother to raise up seed for him. Eventually there's also the leaving of the father's house.

The ten years that they spend in the land of Moab might also remind us of the ten years that Abram spent in Canaan in Genesis chapter 16 verse 3 before he took Hagar. Malon and Kilion mean sickness and destruction and they're fitting names. They die in the land of Moab.

Naomi, ironically, means pleasantness which is an important detail to keep in mind as we read further. They receive news that the Lord has visited his people. This is language associated with deliverance and salvation elsewhere.

And now they're going to return to the land from the place of death. And the two daughters-in-law of Naomi accompany her, showing loyalty to her. Naomi instructs each of them to return to her mother's house but they both stick with her.

Her instruction to them to return to their mother's house and to their gods is a sort of inversion of the Abraham themes that are already bubbling away in the background of the text. The Lord said to Abraham, go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. Naomi seems to request that Orpah and Ruth do the opposite.

They both insist on staying with her though. She then makes a stronger case. She is barren, she's too old to remarry and even if those things weren't the case, they would have to wait far too long for new sons to marry.

Orpah means back of the neck which seems appropriate as she turns back at this point. Ruth, however, expresses the most extreme loyalty to her mother-in-law at this point, in keeping with the meaning of her name, friend. She describes her bond with Naomi as akin to one of marriage.

This is an extreme act of loving-kindness on Ruth's part. She is giving up her country, her family and everything that she's known to stick with her mother-in-law. This is remarkable loving-kindness and Ruth's loving-kindness is a central theme of this story.

It reflects the Lord's own loving-kindness and it will be the means by which life is brought to a dead situation. The most similar account of such loyalty that we find is in 2 Samuel 15 verses 19-22. Then the king said to Ittai the Gittite, Why do you also go with us? Go back and stay with the king, for you are a foreigner and also an exile from your home.

You came only yesterday, and shall I today make you wander about with us? Since I go I know not where. Go back and take your brothers with you, and may the Lord show steadfast love and faithfulness to you. But Ittai answered the king, As the Lord lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king shall be, whether for death or for life, there also will your servant be.

And David said to Ittai, Go then, pass on. So Ittai the Gittite passed on with all his men and all the little ones who were with him. Ittai the Gittite is another foreigner who shows

great loyalty to the family of David.

Just as here, David's great grandmother Ruth shows considerable loyalty and loving kindness to Naomi. In both cases we see a remarkable gentile being knit into the people of God. Naomi returns and is recognised after her long absence.

However, she wishes to be called Naomi Pleasantness no more. Now she wants to be called Mara, Bitter, as she has suffered cruel providences from the Lord. They arrive in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

There may be a sign here of new life. A question to consider. In what ways could Ruth's commitment to Naomi be seen as a conversion? 1 Corinthians chapter 6 When one of you has a grievance against another, does he dare go to law before the unrighteous instead of the saints? Or do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if the world is to be judged by you, are you incompetent to try trivial cases? Do you not know that we are to judge angels? How much more then matters pertaining to this life? So if you have such cases, why do you lay them before those who have no standing in the church? I say this to your shame.

Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers, but brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers? To have lawsuits at all with one another is already a defeat for you. Why not rather suffer wrong? Why not rather be defrauded? But you yourselves wrong and defraud, even your own brothers. Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived, neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

And such were some of you, but you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be dominated by anything.

Food is meant for the stomach and the stomach for food, and God will destroy both one and the other. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body, and God raised the Lord and will also raise us up by His power. Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a prostitute? Never! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a prostitute becomes one body with her? For, as it is written, the two will become one flesh, but he who is joined to the Lord becomes one spirit with him.

Flee from sexual immorality! Every other sin a person commits is outside the body, but the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not

your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 6 Paul raises the issue of the Corinthian Christians bringing legal cases against other Christians in the congregation. The previous chapter had highlighted the responsibility that the church had to cast judgment in the case of the man with his father's wife. In that case the church was called to gather together and declare judgment condemning the man and delivering him over to Satan.

This judgment anticipated the final judgment. At the end of the chapter Paul declared, For what have I to do with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church who you are to judge? God judges those outside. Purge the evil person from among you.

It is likely that the parties involved in these legal cases were wealthier and more powerful. They were using the courts against weaker persons in all likelihood, as civil cases were matters for the rich and powerful, and the outcome of such cases would likely have been decided by the wealth of the parties involved. Paul cross-examines those who are so eager to go to the law courts.

Don't they know that the saints will one day judge the world? That they'll even judge angels? And yet the Corinthians are suggesting by their actions that they are incompetent to adjudicate in everyday cases. Paul might have verses such as Daniel chapter 7 verses 21-22 and verse 27 of that chapter in mind when he talks about the judgment that the saints will exercise over the world and over angels. As I looked, this horn made war with the saints, and prevailed over them, until the Ancient of Days came, and judgment was given for the saints of the Most High, and the time came when the saints possessed the kingdom.

And the kingdom and the dominion and the greatness of the kingdoms, under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the Most High. His kingdom shall be an everlasting kingdom, and all dominion shall serve and obey him. Matthew chapter 19 verse 28 gives a similar impression.

The Corinthians think that they have great wisdom, they think that they reign like kings, and yet for all of this supposed super-spirituality they act as if unbelievers are better equipped to judge than Christians. The very fact of such legal conflict between church members is already a sign of catastrophic failure, even apart from the scandal of airing their personal disputes before unbelievers, and in the process tacitly admitting their inadequacy to execute judgment themselves. Paul wants the Corinthians to feel ashamed that such a situation could arise, and he twists the knife of his criticism in verse 5. Can it be that there is no one among you wise enough to settle a dispute between the brothers? You who have been talking so much about your wisdom and your reigning like kings? Is there truly no one among you who can deal with these cases? The Corinthians seem to have forgotten that they are the people of God.

If anything, the Corinthians should prefer to allow themselves be wronged and defrauded than to go to the unrighteous pagans, those who are despised for their injustice, for judgment. It is much better to be defrauded and wronged than to defraud and wrong. And then also a preoccupation with your rights over other concerns is a sign of the flesh.

Paul's point is not that legal cases are always inappropriate. Rather, the behaviour of the Corinthians is revealing deep problems within their community, it's revealing the hollowness of their boast, and it's also showing that they are not a people who love and care for each other. They are rather acting as people of the flesh, people who will bite and devour each other, people who are preoccupied with their own rights over the well-being of all.

Paul wants the Corinthians to be aware that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God. Bringing predatory legal cases against others and having sexual relations with your father's wife are practices characteristic of this evil age, and those who practice or give themselves over to such things will end up being condemned with the evil age. Back in verse 11 of the preceding chapter, Paul wrote, But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother, if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler, not even to eat with such a one.

He mentions these offences again in this chapter, but he adds to them adulterers and thieves and two others, which the ESV combines as men who practice homosexuality. Many of these things are related to the offenders that must be cut off in the book of Deuteronomy and elsewhere. The greedy, the thieves and the swindlers might relate to the discussion of people going to court against others, that's what they're engaged in, and these are not the practices of those who will inherit the kingdom of God.

The words grouped together as men who practice homosexuality should probably be distinguished. Other translations use terms like passive homosexual partners practicing homosexuals, or effeminate nor sodomites, or male prostitutes sodomites. They seem to form a pair, but there are differences between these two things.

Some have seen it as the active and the passive partner in homosexual relations, but there is probably more going on. The second term appears here in the Greek record for the first time. It is, however, a word that essentially refers to one who lies with a male, as we see the construction of the term.

It presumably is based upon the Old Testament prohibition in Leviticus 18 verse 22, you shall not lie with a male as with a woman, it is an abomination. The first word literally means soft ones, and is often translated effeminate, although the term isn't etymologically related to femininity, as it is in English, although it can be conceptually related, as soft men would often adopt feminine affectations. Because of the association of effeminacy with male prostitution or passive homosexual partners in antiquity, some have translated it those ways, drawing those more specific associations.

The association with homosexual practice does seem to be there, however it should not be so narrowly defined. The concept here is not merely concerned with sexual behaviour, but also includes what many would term presentation. In Deuteronomy chapter 22 verse 5 we're told, a woman shall not wear a man's garment, nor shall a man put on a woman's cloak, for whoever does these things is an abomination to the Lord your God.

The concept of softness here probably involves a cluster of related things. Sexual deviance and intimacy, men acting and dressing like women, a devotion to luxury, ease and pleasure. And these are the sinners in Paul's list that get the most attention, as they excite the most controversy in the current context.

However they are classed alongside sexually immoral persons more generally, alongside drunkards and other sinners whose sins are more economic in character. Paul's point here however is to call the Corinthians to live out the transformation that has occurred in their lives. They used to be all of these things, they used to be defined by such behaviours, traits and practices.

But something changed. He writes, you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God. He presumably has their baptism in mind here, when they were washed and their setting apart was sealed to them.

Baptism is also a public declaration of our vindication by God, sealing our justification. Like the coronation ceremony performed upon someone who has acceded to the throne, baptism is a formal solemnisation of our new status in Christ. We should be able to look back at our baptisms and recall all the realities that have been sealed to us in it, adoption, justification, sanctification, forgiveness of sins, and then grasping hold of these promises and gifts by faith, live confidently in terms of them.

That seems to be what Paul intends here, by recalling the Corinthians to the fact of their baptism, he will now call them to live out its meaning faithfully. The Corinthians seem to have used slogans to describe their spirituality, and Paul takes these up and responds to them, all things are lawful or permitted for me. They think that they reign like kings, they are the wise, they have freedom to act as they please.

Paul responds to their slogans in verses 12-14. So the Corinthian slogan, all things are lawful or permitted for me. Paul's response, but not all things are helpful.

The Corinthian slogan, all things are lawful or permitted for me, but I will not be dominated by anything. And then the Corinthian slogan, food is meant for the stomach, and the stomach for food, and God will destroy both one and the other. And then Paul's response, the body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body, and God raised the Lord, and will also raise us up by his power.

You should see the symmetry between those statements. Food is meant for the stomach, and the stomach for food. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body.

And then God will destroy both one and the other, and God raised the Lord, and will also raise us up by his power. The Corinthians believe that everything is permitted them, but not everything is helpful and edifying. They champion unfettered liberty, but such liberty can take liberties with us and end up binding us to its service.

As they are elevated spiritual persons they think it doesn't matter what they do with their bodies. Yet the body is not marginalised by Christian spirituality. The body will not be finally destroyed, but it belongs to the Lord and it will be raised up just as Christ's body was raised.

The Corinthians seem to use this slogan about food to justify their sexual promiscuity and other forms of sexual immorality. If the body is just going to be destroyed it doesn't really matter that much what you do or don't do with your body. They could continue sleeping with prostitutes because the body ultimately does not matter.

Our bodies, however, Paul argues, are in an intimate union with Christ. They are his members, his limbs and his organs. He talks about this sort of thing in Romans 6.13. In the context of that chapter he is talking about baptism.

In baptism our bodies are presented to God. They are marked out as his and they are marked out for resurrection. In chapter 12 verse 1 of Romans I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Spiritual worship involves the presentation of bodies. Our bodies belong to Christ and should not be joined to prostitutes. Paul quotes Genesis chapter 2 verse 24 about the man and the woman becoming one flesh.

Irrespective of the intent of the parties involved, a union occurs. Our bodies are united to Christ and they must be treated accordingly. We should not take something that is holy to Christ and unite it to the unholy prostitute.

We have been given the spirit of Christ and such union is incompatible with such unholy sexual unions. Paul makes the statement flee from sexual immorality and the Corinthians implicit response is, Every sin a person commits is outside the body. It doesn't really impact upon me.

And then Paul responds by arguing that the sexually immoral person sins against his own body. He is defiling the church of God. He is dishonouring his body.

He is taking what belongs to Christ and giving it to an unholy person. The church, as Paul

has argued in chapter 3 verses 16-17, is God's temple. Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him.

For God's temple is holy and you are that temple. The individual however is also the temple with the spirit dwelling in them. We must treat our bodies accordingly.

They are temples of the Holy Spirit. Our bodies are not our own to act with however we please. We were bought with the price of Christ's sacrificed body and we must glorify God in our bodies for that reason.

A question to consider, how does the foundation of Christian sexual ethics as described by Paul contrast with the foundation of modern sexual ethics?