

The Book of Ruth is filled with sacramental imagery, like, **The Lord visited His people and given them food**. What was that OT lesson all about? A man Elimelech from Bethlehem leaves for food, what humiliation to depart the promise land to the stained land Moab. Moabites, forever stained people. Long ago, Lot had incest with his daughter and bore Moab, the matriarch of these despised Moabite peoples. So Naomi is widowed, sons gone. Naomi intends daughter-in-laws Oprah and Ruth return to their own people. Naomi has no future to offer these women, yet God uses Naomi as His instrument to show His faithfulness in the promise of the Christ.

The story is foremost not about, Ruth's commitment to Naomi as an example we should imitate. But Ruth's commitment is an act of God's grace, giving her the Word of the true God, making her in His family. Ruth will become the gr.grandmother of David; thus ancestor of Jesus. Ruth displays God's grace, although Naomi is encouraging her to leave in difficult times.

The names in Ruth reveal much about sin and God's grace. Elimelech means my God is king. The boys, Mahlon means sick, Chilion means pining (mental or physical disorder). Like Mahlon and Chilion you are sick and pining in your sin. Like Ruth, of the despised Moabites you are a child of sin and corruption. Bethlehem, which means house of Bread, by God's grace, He draws them to their Father's house, the ancestor of the Bethlehem babe, who visits His people to feed them Bread of heaven, Himself.

Our Lord's grace, not our commitment, provides everything we need. God draws the foreigner Ruth, as well you, who does not belong, into His family.

One of the most disturbing, troubling things I hear; you can hear in life is when a doctor steps into the room, says, there's nothing we can do. It echoes in your mind. What about, what if, what about this...Sorry, there's nothing we do. The reality starts to set in, fear, denial, acceptance, a rush of emotions. You will resign to the fact, there is nothing you can do.

There's nothing we can do, the prognosis of leprosy in Biblical times. Nothing you can do. Leprosy, the worse thing isn't' severe sores all over your body, eyes, mouth. Flesh decaying, fingers and toes decay and fall off. As wretched a disease known to man highly contagious, no one wants it. A walking death. The worse thing isn't the disease itself, but it makes you an outcast, you can no longer embrace family again; worse of all, separated from the worship life and temple of Israel. **They lifted up their voices, Jesus, have mercy on us.**

The healing of the lepers is not a story about gratitude. The lepers wanted a cure, restoration of their flesh, health, reunion with friends and family. He

gave them all of that. His mercy would go further. It would drive Him to the cross to exchange His life for theirs. There's nothing He would not give those 10 lepers, nothing He would keep from them; He loved them before and without their prayers and praise. He would clean their souls, keep them safe in His perfect love. He took care of everything for them. He cares for you no less.

9 did not return to Jesus. They were doing what Jesus told them, following the Levitical law, to show themselves to the priest, go to the temple. Yet, they failed to see the kingdom of God in Jesus. The temple purposes being fulfilled in Him. The temple, dwelling of God, now in the flesh. Ironically a foreigner truly sees who heals him. And shows himself to the great high priest. **Arise, go your way, your faith has made you well.** Or more literally, **your faith has saved you.** Your faith has saved you. Faith saves only by bringing Christ. Faith, to believe, to trust, the gift, the instrument that receives God's grace and gifts. We don't focus upon faith. Faith looks to Christ alone.

1 leper returned; recognized Jesus is God; came to worship Him. That's what faith does. It seeks to be filled with Jesus, with His forgiveness. He came back to be physically present with God, to be fed, nourished.

Leprosy, an icon of sin. A walking death. You're unclean, diseased, decaying in your flesh. Helpless. Separated from the presence of God. There is nothing you can do to cure or minimize the disease in you. How often you fail to see the severity of your disease.

Join the ranks of outcasts, lepers, in the liturgy—**Lord, have mercy upon us; Christ, have mercy upon us; Lord, have mercy upon us.** Sing this week after week as leprosy of sin infects our flesh and our lives, there's nothing we can do. Nothing you can do. There's always something He can do, no matter what. His miracle for you, brings the cure of your disease, declares you washed clean.

The Book of Ruth, as well those lepers, you do not want to be alone, you want to belong. God draws you to Himself, to do what you can't do, to redeem you, heal your woes, give you a future. You are no longer a foreigner, outcast but baptized into His family, you belong to Him, never to be alone or separated. Cry out to Jesus in your need, He calls back to you with His words of life. In your failure, in brokenness of body and mind, in your disease He says, **You are forgiven, cleansed. By my wounds you are healed; death cannot harm you. You are mine. I am with you. Do not fear, I make all things new. Arise, go your way. Your faith has saved you.** Made you well, wholeness of body and soul. He has made you well. **The Lord has visited His people this very day and given them food.**