

Reflection for November 3, 2024 – Today's Ruth Inspired by Ruth 1:1-18 NRSV

My daughter Leiann just acquired a new addition to their family, a ten-week-old Coon hound.

Puppies are adorable. And this young fellow Milo is no exception. Just look at that sweet face. (And big paws)! I'm confident everyone here today, given the chance, would love to pick this guy up and have a great cuddle.

Why do they come into the world so delightfully cute? It's mother nature's ploy! She knows how much work rearing a puppy to adult dog-hood is, and she makes it so you can't resist. But a puppy is a huge commitment.

My daughter lives on the 4th floor of a condo. Imagine what fun that will be potty training. Whine whine, it's 3 am, I have to pee. Get dressed, go downstairs, outside and then upstairs again, and hopefully back to bed. Milo don't chew that! Milo come back here with my sock. Milo off. Milo leave the cat alone. Milo get out of the cat box.

And don't Coon hounds like to howl? That's going to be interesting in a 4-story condo complex with close neighbours.

Persistence and a lot of patience will be needed to bring Milo along in his training. And that is a huge commitment. It's not something that happens in just a few weeks. In fact, as those of us who are dog owners are aware, caring for a dog is a life-long endeavour. However, we also realize the incredible dividends of that commitment. We bond and are blessed by a loving loyal companion.

Dogs seem to know what we need. They curl up at our feet to keep us company, climb up on our lap when we need a cuddle, rest their heads on our knee sensing we need a little reassurance. They entertain us with silly antics of flopping in the snow, running in circles, chasing a toy, attempting to speak, running through the fall leaves or chasing a squirrel. Dogs provide years of endless loyal companionship.

The commitment we make to them is returned to us 10-fold. And so, in many ways our commitment "pays for itself." It is reciprocated through a life-long relationship of joy.

**Where you go, I will go;
where you lodge, I will lodge;
your people shall be my people
and your God my God.**

Ruth also makes a life-long commitment. This one, to be with her mother-in-law forever. In this supportive, selfless, compassionate act, there is no expectation of any specific reward Ruth will receive. There is no personal benefit. In fact, there is much at risk and much for Ruth to lose.

A Moabite woman, and one who had been part of a mixed marriage with a Hebrew Man, arriving in Bethlehem would have set off all sorts of cultural, social and religious alarms. Ruth would have felt out of place and uncomfortable. Identifiable as a foreigner, comments regarding her ethnicity would have been expected. Stares, raised eyebrows, and racial slurs, could have come her way and probably did. Ruth did not fit in.

But in spite of the challenges that face her, Ruth stands above. Incapable of addressing her own needs, she follows the heartbeat of compassion. Naomi is in need, Ruth will serve.

Ruth's actions define what commitment really is.

This early part of the book of Ruth is a Jesus' story. It would unfold again some 700 – 900 or so years later.

From Matthew 19:21 -

21 Jesus said to him, “If you wish to be perfect, go, sell your possessions, and give the money^[d] to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”

This is a conversation Jesus has with a wealthy young man. You might recall the individual's response to Jesus' instruction.

22 When the young man heard this word, he went away grieving, for he had many possessions.

The kind of dedication Jesus was speaking about was way beyond what the young man could comprehend. But that is of course what Jesus literally did, he left a simple carpenter's life to serve God. And he did so at his own peril.

Ruth did the same thing. And we know of course others who have followed. We might hold up the names of Mother Teresa, known for her incredible missionary work, or Florence Nightingale, the founder of modern-day nursing.

We all can't be like Florence or Theresa though. It is difficult for us to follow Ruth's path, and we certainly can't be Jesus. However, emulating these prophetic individuals and their ministries is not beyond our reach.

As more and more UC COF's face challenges of amalgamation or closure from declining membership and finances, new clergy candidates are stepping up expressing their commitment for church leadership. I meet many of them in my role as an interview panel member. And it always amazes me when we ask someone why they would choose ministry in such times as these. Their answers, in one way or another, speak the same truth. God is calling them to be in pastoral ministry. They see an incarnate Jesus serving, and they identify with that vision. Caring for those that need most to be cared for, speaking for justice, and spreading Jesus' word of love is unavoidable. They're drawn into it like moths to a bright light. Ruth is very much alive in the calling of new ministers.

Yesterday I managed to spend an hour and a half with our Anglican neighbours at their annual bazaar. Several of you were there as well. I wondered how long it took to set up all those tables? What kind of organization was required to get all the items down there for sale? How many people were needed to sit at the displays to take in donations?

I wondered who made the soups and chili? Who made all the desserts that Phyllis was organizing behind the counter? Who organized the raffles? I expect every Anglican from St. Margaret's was at that bazaar somewhere, and I expect most of them stayed after the event to clean and put away tables and chairs. Ruth was at the bazaar as well.

Ruth will quietly work in the background putting together all the logistics of the Ye Olde Christmas Shoppe Bargain Bin sale here later this month. And she is scheduling baking and chili making plus organizing volunteers for the PUC Christmas Bake sale and cookie walk. I expect she is planning on attending the upcoming Worship Committee meeting and our Board meeting in December.

Many times, Ruth is invisible, off in the background decorating the sanctuary for Thanksgiving, preparing communion, writing checks, preparing presentation slides, organizing fellowship time, working with contractors to install improved outdoor lighting, arranging for musicians or organizing shift coverage at the Bargain Bin.

Today's Ruth is not a refugee seeking asylum in the company of a former Peachlander. Ruth is the Stalwart disciple who cares deeply about this place and the people who come here to be bathed in light. She offers hands out in fellowship. She holds in her heart those who might be feeling the pain of rejection or loss. She offers a sweet melody to those whose ears have grown deaf to God's love song. She is the presence of the Christ who walks with all who feel they are alone or abandoned.

Ruth is here within us, mentoring us in kin-dom living.

But you may ask, what does she receive in return? How do we benefit from our service with Ruth? There is no cute bundle of fur to cuddle with at the end of a difficult day.

Ah but yes there is! There is the knowing that your many acts of grace have gently touched someone in ways you can never imagine. A heart is lifted, tears are dried, lonely souls are blessed, God's spirit-love reaches out where it is needed most. And that is thanks to "the Ruth" in you. That is the incredible blessing we receive.

Thanks for listening to me this morning. Amen