

There is nothing like the unexpected to cause us to re-evaluate life. Do you know what I mean?

I heard a humorous story recently about a gentleman who went out ice fishing. He went to a certain location and got out his drill to open up a hole in the ice and when he started drilling, he heard a voice from above, "You will never find fish there."

He was surprised and moved to another location and started drilling there. He heard the voice again, "You will never find fish there."

He went to a third location and got ready to drill a third time and again he heard a voice from above that said, "You will never find fish there."

By now the man was so surprised he just couldn't help himself. "Who are you? God? What are you trying to tell me?"

The voice came back, "I am the owner of the skating rink. You won't find fish here."

The fisherman realized that he was looking in the wrong place for fish. The unexpected voice caused him to re-evaluate his plan. Has the unexpected ever caused you to re-evaluate life? And when you were surprised by life, what did you do? Were you tempted to give up? Were you tempted to blame God? Did you want to run away? Did you enter into denial? What did you do?

Our scripture for today has something to say to anyone who finds themselves in the midst of an unexpected crisis. I believe we can learn something about how to live and move through crisis by looking at Ruth.

Before I get to that, let me remind you of where we are. We are in the midst of a sermon series called *Models of Faith, Celebrating 50 Years of Women in Ministry in the United Methodist Church*. We are celebrating this incredible gift of women receiving full ordination rights in our denomination by looking at strong women from the Bible and seeing what we can learn about how they acted faithfully in times of crisis and challenge.

The story of Ruth from the Old Testament is a short story. It is a beautiful story. If you have never read it before, I want to urge you to go home today and take 20 - 30 minutes to read the whole story on your own.

Ruth's mother-in-law, Naomi, finds herself in a foreign land. Her husband is dead. And within ten years her two sons are dead. She has no way to support her daughters-in-law, so she decides to go back to her homeland of Israel. As she goes, she sends her daughters-in-law back to their parents; so maybe, just maybe they can have a life, a hope and a future.

Orpah decides to leave Naomi. We never hear of her again.

Ruth chooses a different path.

When Naomi looks at Ruth and says, "You too, leave me. You too, go back to your family." Naomi is offering Ruth the chance to have a life. It is the chance to have a future.

It was the best choice. It was the most logical choice. Because Naomi had nothing left to offer. She was destined for a hard life with no security.

Think back to the last time you struggled. What did you do? How did you find your way through that struggle? What can you learn from the lessons of that struggle?

I am not sure why Ruth chose to not leave Naomi. We aren't really told why. What we see is that Ruth chooses to remain loyal to Naomi by not leaving. What we see is that Ruth chooses to remain loyal to God and not abandon her faith or the traditions she has adopted. ***Ruth is able to look past the present moment of difficulties, to trust in God.*** Have you ever been able to look past the present moment of difficulties to trust in God?

Challenges of life abound. Life is not easy. And when the challenges come, whether it is the news that someone doesn't want to be married to us anymore, or that our services for work are not needed anymore, or that we are not nor were we good parents, it is difficult to see past the moment of pain we find ourselves in.

I know how difficult it is to see past the pain. Because I have lived through pain. So have many of you. But let me tell you, the pain doesn't last forever. It will end, if we allow ourselves to trust God to help us through the pain.

I want to tell you a story of a man who underwent open-heart surgery. The day before the surgery an attractive nurse came into his room to visit. She took hold of his hand and told him to feel it and hold it. He said, "I thought it was a great idea!"

"Now," she said, "during the surgery tomorrow you will be disconnected from your heart and you will be kept alive only by the virtue of certain machines. And when your heart is finally restored and the operation is over and you are recovering, you will eventually awaken in a special recovery room. But you will be immobile for as long as six hours. You may be unable to move, or speak, or even to open your eyes, but you will be perfectly conscious and you will hear and you will know everything that is going on around you. During those six hours I will be at your side and I will hold your hand, exactly as I am doing now. I will stay with you until you are fully recovered.

Although you may feel absolutely helpless, when you feel my hand you, will know that I will not leave you."

And the man who had surgery later said, "It happened exactly as the nurse said. I awoke, and could do nothing. And at first I was afraid, but then, as I remembered the nurse's words and as I felt the nurse's hand in my hand for hours. That made all the difference!"

God wants us to place our hand in God's. God wants us to place our life in God's hands, to carry us through the tough scary times in which we live. When we have experienced God's healing in our darkest time, then we are able to go out and celebrate and announce to others what God is doing in our life.

Ruth is a model for us of trust and loyalty. And if you read the rest of the story, you will get to see how God saw that loyalty and rewarded it.

In the midst of the challenges we face. May we learn to trust the God who loves us and who chooses to never let us go.

Amen