

## **“Communion of Saints – You’re Included”**

**Sunday, September 5, 2010**

**Ruth 4:13-17 and 2:8-14**

The end of August and the beginning of September is the time period for Family Reunions to convene and Labor Unions to celebrate. “The Family Reunion Institute of Temple University is the only organization of its kind in the United States. The mission of the Institute is to serve as a resource to families having reunions. The Institute sees the family reunion as a catalyst for carrying out critical extended family functions such as providing a sense of belonging and concern, transmitting a sense of identity and direction, and strengthening values.” (Family Reunion Institute of Temple University Website). “Labor Day, the first Monday in September, is a creation of the labor movement and is dedicated to the social and economic achievements of American workers. It constitutes a yearly national tribute to the contributions workers have made to the strength, prosperity, and well-being of our country. The form that the observance and celebration of Labor Day should take were outlined in the first proposal of the holiday — a street parade to exhibit to the public “the strength and esprit de corps of the trade and labor organizations” of the community, followed by a festival for the recreation and amusement of the workers and their families.” (DOL Website: The History of Labor Day). Today is also the first Sunday of the month and that means we will share in the Sacrament of Holy Communion. The confluence of all these experiences that employ the root word union - Reunion, Trade Union and Communion - form a social and spiritual synergy that may well speak to this special season we share - a season of suspicion and cynicism, fear and frustration, posturing and polarization. Today, I launch a new homiletical line. For the next six sermons that I preach, the word “Include” will be featured. The balm of the biblical basis for the series will come for the Old Testament Book of Ruth. And at the end of it all I expect we will know what it means and what it takes to Include and to Be Included. Over the months of September and October these sub-themes will surface: **Creation – It’s All Inclusive (it’s all good); Character Building I – Identity, (identity crisis); Character Building II – Integrity, (honor and humility revisited); Consequences of Being Included, (Incarnation irritants); Chesed – Radical Inclusion, (love is a many splendored thing)**. Good will and good manners - good gracious have left the room. In the face of economic strife, global conflict and religious sectarianism the people are perishing and we need to peer purposefully into this Pandora’s box and publish glad tidings and practice peace – a peace that passes understanding. So, let’s overview this opportunity to observe God at work designing a new day by starting with the very end of the Book of Ruth. The good news is that Bible tells us that Jesus was of the House of David – a descendant of a mighty Israeli King, a King loved by God. The better news is that if you follow all of the genealogy - the family tree, family reunion rosters - there is plenty of room for discerning in God’s ultimate plan a bunch of love for diversity and much opportunity for victorious living for everyone – these phrases, if you’re interested can be retained if you simply remember the words BOLD MOVE. “So, Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When they came together, the Lord made her conceive and she bore a son. Then the women said to Naomi, “Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without next-of-kin; and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him... The women of the neighborhood gave him a name saying, ‘A son has been born to Naomi.’ They named him Obed; he became the father of Jesse, the father of David.” The genealogy that eventually appears in the first chapter of the

Gospel of Matthew begins here in the Book of Ruth with Perez. A genealogy that fails to include both Elimelech, Naomi's husband and Mahlon, Naomi's first-mentioned son and most-likely Ruth's first husband. Boaz, Ruth's second husband is charted as the father of Obed, and Obed "builds up the house" of Boaz, not the house of Mahlon. Clearly the teller of this tale conceded the classic considerations of charting the case in order to make Obed the heir to Elimelech's property. The failure to mention either Elimelech or Mahlon in the genealogy is striking in its deviation from standard ancient practice. But since when did God let standard practice stand in the way of a spiritual purpose? And that's the point of this whole story. Matthew's list of ancestors from Abraham to Jesus names Rahab as mother of Boaz. Matthew is referring to the Rahab the non-Israelite woman from Jericho who harbored Israelite spies, and aligned herself with Israel and with Israel's God (Joshua 2:1-21). If Rahab, the Canaanite prostitute from Jericho, was the mother of Boaz, then Obed had a Moabite mother and a Canaanite grandmother. What a BOLD MOVE. Kathleen Robertson Farmer in her reflections on the Book of Ruth states, "The stories told about the ancestors of Ruth and Boaz make it clear that the messianic king comes from a well-established line of tricksters who have mixed and not always admirable motives for what they do. Whatever determined David's eligibility to father the messianic line of kings, we can be sure that it was neither the ethnic nor the moral purity of his ancestral line! The collective point these stories make is not that the mothers and fathers of the Messiah were exceptionally worthy people, but that God can use even the least likely agents to bring about redemption." God and God's agents, angels and apostles move boldly to announce that God acts in the course of human events and hearts and that no human regardless of kin, class, color or condition is out of bounds, off limits or segregated from use in God's aggressive agency. We, are then, all of us a critical mass of miracle making material – a communion of saints. If this is the good and better news, the bad news is that this is not good news to so many people who claim Christ for their own. For so many, the Prince of Peace, is not fully hybrid humanity and fully determined divinity but some mythical manifestation that gets manipulated in the moment. The Rev. Scott Summerville, the pastor of the Asbury United Methodist Church in Crestwood, New York said this in a sermon he delivered on Sunday, November 5, 2006, "That invisible mixture of human and divine love is what we call the communion of the saints. That means that we, too, are saints. You do not need to be perfect to be a saint." As we explore the theme of God's incredible inclusive initiating intimacy with all humanity through the lens of the Story of Ruth, we will be challenged by the questions: Who is the "Moabite" in the eyes of our community? Who do we dismiss and discredit because of their origins. Who do we blame for the destruction of and decline in our moral and material world? Who is excluded from our community of faith? Might God use such a one to rally our redemption? The Story of Ruth ends with God, once again having made a way out of no way and pointing passed the present to the promised land. It is no coincidence that just like God led the Israelites through Moab the territory east of the Jordan River into the land flowing with milk and honey, God leads his loving legacy of our Lord through a Moabite day laborer. There is so much to glean in this glorious soulful story. More later, in the meantime let's pause as did Boaz and Ruth, no longer foreign to each other and certainly not foreign to God, to break bread and to drink wine – nourishing our souls for our season of stepping up to serve the savior.