

Going Where the Grass is greener
Ruth 1:1-22

Friends, the closest thing that I've come to experiencing famine was in high school when I participated in an event sponsored by World Vision called the 30hr famine – perhaps you've heard of it. You go without food for 30hrs to experience a little bit of what its like for many people in this world who go without food on a daily basis. It was tough.

And I also know what its like to look for work, to try and find a job which will pay the bills and provide for you and your family. It's not always easy, and sometimes you have to make sacrifices or put up with less than ideal living arrangements.

When Amoriza and I were first married, we had moved to St. Catherines, ON where I was going to take on a ministry position. Long story short, I backed out of that ministry position because I didn't see that it would how I would be able to raise financial support for it – so for the next couple years I commuted 45 minutes into Burlington where I was working night shift at a factory in the press shop, working with sheet metal.

It can be a very difficult and trying time, and anyone who has experienced living with less than what they need, or having to juggle a crazy schedule just to make ends meet knows what its like to think that there must be an easier way to do this...

Maybe you know what that's like as well?

And there's a phrase we have to describe when someone is looking for better opportunities and a better life – “we say they are looking for greener pastures”

So if you've ever experienced this, then you can relate to the circumstances which prompted Naomi and her family to move from Bethlehem over to Moab – they were looking for greener pastures – quite literally.

And often when people are looking for greener pastures it's not simply just a matter of moving on to bigger or better opportunities, like graduating high school and going on to study at university...

No, when you are “looking for greener pastures” it’s because there is an underlying element of being disillusioned with your current circumstances. You’re disillusioned because they promised much and delivered little.

Have you ever been disillusioned with something that you thought would deliver more than what it did?

Certainly Naomi and her family did – they were born in Promised Land, the land of great expectations which the Israelites had finally come to after wandering in the desert for forty years. A land where they could settle down and farm build towns and cities and prosper. And at first that is what happened.

Naomi means “*pleasant*” - life was good. And she marries a man named Elimelech – which means “*My God is King*” - and friends... when life is pleasant, when life is good; it’s easy to believe that our God is in control, that He is King.

But after a while the promised land didn’t live up to its promises anymore – the nation of Moab on the eastern border

invaded and subjugated the Israelites and made them pay tribute, and then there was a famine to top it all off. Insult to injury.

Life was no longer good, and who could believe that God was the King when your enemies had conquered you!

So Naomi and Elimelech name their sons - but not with Israelite names, but instead with old Cananite names - Mahon and Killion which mean – “weak” and “wasting away” respectively. They are children of suffering and sorrow born into a world of want, children who are not brought up to believe in the promises that there was a God who would take care of them, provide for them, who would call them His own.

And eventually the family’s disillusionment peaks and when the opportunity presents itself to move on to greener pastures – they leave behind the Promised Land – they leave the town of Bethlehem, whose name ironically means “*the house of food*” – they leave it all behind and go to the land of Moab, to find food, and a future...and perhaps a new god?

You know friends; many people have given up on God because of the hard times they go through, because of their experience with the church or with other Christians, or because of the horrific suffering and evil they see operating in this world.

Maybe you can relate? Maybe you've gone down this path?

You're disillusioned with God and his promises, with how He runs the world, with what He's allowed to happen to you and your family.

Where was God when....? If that's the kind of God He is then forget him...! I don't need this... I don't believe in Him and I'm moving on to greener pastures elsewhere!

Something else holds more promise for you – you see the answers to life's problems in becoming educated, in therapy and psychology, in being environmentally conscious, in volunteering and helping out to make a difference - in things where you actually see results.

Not that there is anything wrong with these things in and of themselves, but when in your disillusionment you leave behind God's promises, and pursue these things – something dies.

Elimelech and his sons meet death in the greener pastures which they thought would bring them life and give their family a future! Now there is nothing left.

That which we seek to find in greener pastures in often kills off our faith – what we thought would give us answers and meaning only raises more questions and uncertainty.

What we thought we could do to make a difference only makes us aware of how much needs to be done – more than we could ever accomplish – so we despair.

And our faith dies – there is nothing left of it to continue on!

But the good news friends is that while we may have been disillusioned with God – He was never disillusioned with us- we've done exactly what He expected us to do. He knows our

hearts. He knows we are fickle and fair-weather friends when it comes to Him.

When life is good – we believe in Him, when things are bad – we doubt Him – from God’s view we’re very predictable.

And so friends - many times the things which cause us to become disillusioned with God are the things which He uses to test us so that we become aware of our fickle hearts and we can decide if we truly love God for God, or if we just love him because He makes our life good!

God wants to move us from loving Christ out of self-interest to loving Christ because of who He is!

And God also allows and works through these things to get our attention - so that we give up *our illusions* and come to a fuller understanding of the truth – of Jesus Christ.

You see the Promised Land was experiencing oppression and famine because it’s inhabitants had come to believe the illusion that what we call the laws of nature, were in fact gods – gods

that determined if there would be enough rain, enough sun, a good harvest, if your flocks and herds would be healthy and increase, if you would have a fertile wife and many children – and that by worshiping and sacrificing to these gods they could ensure the promise of a good life and safe borders.

So God backed off to show them it wasn’t true – these gods didn’t deliver.

So Friends, what is it that we really believe and trust in and worship to ensure that we have a good life? Because if it’s not Jesus Christ – then out of love and concern for us God will back off and allow hardship to show you that what we trust and believe in is an illusion. That it doesn’t deliver.

And then, we are in a position to hear the good news! Just like Naomi does – there is food once again in Bethlehem – the “house of food” is full once more. So Naomi returns back home, back to God.

Friends, the good news for us that in Bethlehem God has provided for us something more than food - He has given us a

savior, one who can take away our disillusionment, forgive us for our fickle hearts and can transform us into faithful, loyal believers – one who can help us return to our God, to his people.

He has given us His son Jesus Christ – the one who said...

"I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. (John 6:35)

"It is written: 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.' "(Matt 4:4)

And my hope is that if you've never had a relationship with God, if you've never believed in him at all, that when you hear "there is more to life than bread" that it will strike a chord in you – that sound the beginning of you coming to faith!

I pray that you will be like Ruth, who had plenty to eat in Moab all her life – but in the end she could see that bread was not enough, it didn't sustain her husband, or her in-laws. Something more was needed...

Something that she believed she would find by going back with Naomi, by starting a relationship with Naomi's God – so that He would become her God

Maybe you look around you on the West Side here, and you can see that we have plenty to eat, we have more than enough – but it doesn't sustain us, it doesn't satisfy us, it doesn't fix marriages, it can't heal cancer, it won't mend a broken heart or give us meaning and purpose. Something more is needed...

Something I hope you believe you will find by coming here and worshiping Jesus Christ, and learning about what it means to become one of his followers – so that our Lord becomes your Lord.

Friends, would you consider it. Are you willing to think about it. Maybe its time – time for a new beginning, time to look for greener pastures where you will find more than just a future...

You will find life – a life that will last! Amen.