

There's Always Hope
Ruth 2:1-23

Friends what do you do when you have to start life all over again? Do you have a plan, some goals? What will your first steps be?

If you've been through some sort of crisis which has sent you back to the beginning again, how do you begin to move forward again?

And that's what we find in the story of Ruth this morning – this is a story about having to pick up and start over.

Last week, we saw how Naomi and her family left Bethlehem in an attempt to start over in the land of Moab, but it proved to be a false start. Instead of finding a better life Naomi lost her husband and her two sons to sickness and disease and there was no one to take care of her.

They all have to start over, again – Naomi, and two women who are the widows of her sons. What do they do?

Well, Naomi hears that there is food back in Bethlehem. God's people have forsaken the false gods they were worshiping and returned to the one true God – He has forgiven them and had mercy on them, so Naomi decides to return to the Promised Land and start over again...and Ruth decides to go with her...and start again too.

Now the thing about starting over is that we can be optimistic or pessimistic about it. And that's usually dependent upon the events that have lead to our having to start over again.

For example – if several of the key players on your favorite football team suffer career ending injuries, or they get traded to another team in exchange for the first round draft pick we know that the team is going to have to start over again in terms of building its players into a cohesive unit that can execute their plays and win games.

And it may be a set back to start over again because they had a good team, but there's always hope that a new group of players might become even better than the last group, the loss opens the door for the possibility of something better – so we're optimistic.

But, there are times when our losses are devastating – a fire destroys our home and all our personal belongings – and our memories, scrapbooks, pictures, sentimental items are lost forever.

Or maybe we've lost a child in a car accident or to an illness and there's a gap in our hearts that can't be filled with something else

Or perhaps it's a marriage that's broken apart, your spouse has betrayed you, left you, they've moved on and you're trying to pick up the pieces of your life and figure out how to start over again.

But in these kinds of circumstances the loss isn't an opportunity to move on to something better – these are the kinds of losses that aren't supposed to happen.

We have fire prevention, we drive carefully, we take our kids to the doctors for regular check-ups, and we make vows to never leave our spouses...

So when we have to start over again, we're not feeling very positive about it! We're grieving, we're full of sorrow and sadness – and it's hard to believe there is always hope! In fact we can't even see anything that would make us hopeful!

So what do we do? We can't very well pretend to be optimistic about this and act like this opens the door for a better opportunity – in fact there's something not right about that. *Eg. "I lost my child; but it's ok, now I have an opportunity to get a better one!!!"*

And if you have a friend who has experienced a loss and is trying to start over...please know you're not helping them by trying to encourage them to be positive about their circumstances, or trying to help them see hope!

The bible says *"Like one who takes away a garment on a cold day, or like vinegar poured on a wound, is one who sings songs to a heavy heart. (Prov 25:20)*

So even saying things like "this is an opportunity for you to grow spiritually" or "you have a chance to grow closer to

Christ in this” is not helpful – because it’s not the right time yet.

When your life has been flooded with tragedy and you have to start over all you can do is wait. Wait and give things time because hope will eventually float up to the surface!

And Hope floats because God is working behind the scenes, even though you can’t see Him and you don’t feel Him, He is working. And at the opportune time – Hope will surface and you can grab onto it, and you will be assured that something good will come from starting over again!

Friends, this is why my favorite lines in chapter 2 of the story of Ruth are...“*as it turned out...*” in verse 3 and “*just then*” in verse 4

Hope just floated to the surface, bllllooop – it surfaces quietly, gently, pops up – nothing spectacular like a whale breaching the surface, or an action hero who’s survived coming up gasping for air – no it just “blllloops” and there it is.

And that’s how it goes in the story - It just so happened that... Ruth goes to see what left over bits and pieces of grain she can scrounge up from the fields and “*as it turns out*” she ends up in Boaz’s field. And “*just then*” Boaz arrives and notices her and asks – “who is that young woman?”

An ordinary effort to go and get some food, a routine visit to inspect the progress of the harvest, are turned into redemptive moments by God, who is quietly working behind the scene– Hope floats up.

But friends, we need to remember that “Hope” is different from “Hoping.” Hoping is simply being in an optimistic state that something better might be coming along, because that’s how we’re dealing with a set back, and we believe its better to be positive than negative – so we’re hopeful.

But “Hope” is a noun – it’s a thing, a place, or a person. It’s real, its far more than an attitude or a feeling. It’s something or someone tangible that God brings into our life when we’re starting over that can really help us.

And the good news friends is that God is quietly working away in the background to bring “Hope” into our lives regardless of whether or not we feel “Hopeful”!

And in the story of Ruth the “hope” which God brings into the lives of Ruth and Naomi is a person – it’s Boaz.

And Boaz is more than just some kind stranger who takes pity on a foreign woman in a tough situation by giving her some food and declaratively instructing his harvesters not to make any trouble for her...

No, Boaz is a relative of Naomi’s dead husband and that puts Him in a legal position of being Naomi and Ruth’s ***guardian-redeemer***.

And if we are to understand why Boaz is such a “hope” we need understand what a “guardian-redeemer” is and what they can do!

Now this isn’t a term that we are familiar with. It’s made up of words that are loaded with legal and theological connotations

and we could spend an entire afternoon looking at all the details involved in it.

But we don’t have that kind of time, so for our purposes this morning the one thing a “guardian-redeemer” can do that concerns us is that He re-purchase a family’s property which they had lost or sold and legally deed it back to that family.

This was something God had built into the social laws which governed Israel. In Leviticus 25:25 God commands "*If one of your fellow Israelites becomes poor and sells some of their property, their nearest relative is to come and redeem what they have sold.*"

Because land was very important in Israel, after all it was the Promised Land, and each family had been given some property, by God – this was he gave them to provide them with food, water, space to build a house and settle down... it was their inheritance, it was what they would give to their children and grand children.

So you didn’t just casually buy and sell land, especially your land!

But if you remember, Naomi and her family had left Bethlehem – and had sold off their property because they hadn't intended on coming back. So when Naomi hears that Ruth has met Boaz and He has treated her kindly – she has “hope” that there is a chance to regain the property she had before!

God has connected Ruth with their guardian-redeemer, she's has met the person who could buy back the land they had sold off when they left and deed it back to her again, and He is showing favor towards them. Hope floats!

Now maybe you've heard that phrase “Hope Floats” before – and you recognize that it's the title of a movie, and maybe you've seen it.

If you have you might remember that it's the story of a woman whose husband dumps her on live TV and runs off with her best friend. She's left to pick up the pieces and try to start over somehow, and in time she does – over time hope floats up to the surface and she survives to become a better person and find love in her life once again.

And it was a popular movie! Because people find hope and encouragement in stories like this! In stories where God is working quietly behind the scenes to bring hope to people who are starting over.

And if you are at that point in life where you've gone through something that has left you picking up the pieces and needing to start over, if you are looking for hope – then I pray that the in the story of Ruth you will find that encouragement and hope.

That you will believe that if God did it for them, He can do it for you! That it “just so happens” that what you need comes into your life

That you won't be discouraged by the insensitive efforts of well-intentioned people who tell you to “stay positive”...to be “hopeful”... but that you would be made aware of the “hope” - that person, place or thing which God will provide to help you as you start over in whatever situation you're in.

And so friends, allow me to be that person who makes you aware of that “hope.”

Because it “*as it turns out*” you’ve come to Valleyview this morning – maybe you’re here because your friend invited you, or you heard there was a free breakfast. Whatever the reason... “*as it turns out*” you’re here. But “*it just so happens*” that someone else is here this morning too! Coincidentally, Jesus Christ is here as well.

We know this true because the Jesus himself promised us that “where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them.” (Matt 18:20)

So allow me to play the part of Naomi and say to you – “Jesus Christ! Well, did you know he is a close relative of ours?”

The bible says ¹⁴ The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Jesus was fully human – just like you and me. So that puts him in a position to be our Redeemer. To re-purchase and give us back the life we may have thrown away because we were disillusioned with God, or the Church, or the Christian faith.

Or maybe we’re more like Ruth, we’ve never been part of this before – we’re brand new to it all – and so Jesus can give us the life we never had before

Because Jesus was a human – he is connected to us and He gives us life because He is at the same time – fully and 100% God.

We have met someone who can relate to us, and at the same time has access to all the power and glory of being God and He can use that to get our lives back for us, which in our own foolishness and sinfulness we lost. Or, He can give us life for the first time because we’ve grown up outside the truth and we’ve only begun to seeking it now, for the first time in our lives!

Friends – Jesus Christ is our Redeemer! You’ve met him this morning, I’ve told you who He is and I’m going to tell you that it would be good for you to stay close with those who work for Him, with those who belong to Him – because, as Naomi says to Ruth “in someone else’s field we might come to harm!”

So Friends take this as an invitation to continue to come out to and be involved here at Valleyview, gleaning what you can from this field.

Because there are other things which seem to promise hope. Things which might look like they could offer you life – like getting away on weekends to recharge, reading self-help books recommended by Oprah, becoming a health-nut, or being the kind of spiritual person who gathers bits and pieces of religious practices and experiences from all over.

And friends while it's true that you might glean a few helpful things here and there in doing this, you could be harmed while doing it, and what's more whoever owns those fields isn't really able to help you.

Only Jesus is our Redeemer – only he can get our lives back for us. So we need to be patient and continue coming to His fields for provision – gleaning what we can from reading the bible, and praying and spending time with fellow Christians in worship.

We need to continue trusting that God who led us to these fields will continue to work quietly behind the scenes as we start over again – and what better place to start over than in the fields of the one who can truly help us, the one who is our “hope” Amen.