

The Advent of Hope
Ruth 2:1-12

Christmas is a great holiday isn't it? Such a wonderful time of happiness, joy, peace and love, its especially nice to decorate our houses, put up the Christmas tree, turn on the lights and put on some nice Christmas music...

and if the weather cooperates there will be a nice covering of snow on the ground – and for a couple of hours that evening everything seems like it might just be alright in the world.

for most people...

But this year friends, everything is not alright for those along the East Coast and in the Caribbean who lost everything to Hurricane Sandy...

This year everything is not alright for those who lives have been turned upside down by civil war in Syria

It's not alright for those who are still looking for work in places where economies are still in recession

It's not going to be alright for those who have lost a loved one and are going through the first Christmas without them

Instead this Christmas is going to be a time where everything around them only serves to remind them of what they have lost.

to remind them of the harsh and depressing fact that somehow they need to pick themselves back up and they have to start all over again.

So friends - what would you do if you had to start life all over again? Do you have a contingency plan? Some sort of idea of what your first steps would be?

If you go through some sort of crisis which sends you back to the beginning, how do you begin to move forward again?

Friends, if Christmas is truly going to be a time where people can find hope and not simply be reminded of what they've lost we need to make sure the message of hope in Christmas is proclaimed and properly explained.

And that's what the story of Ruth does for us – because it a story about how Hope emerges when we have to pick up and start over again.

So... a bit of background info about what's happened in the story before the part that we read this morning.

Naomi and her family left Bethlehem – and Israel 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 turned away from 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 – her gentile daughter-in-law decides to go with her...and start again too.

And friends we need to acknowledge that when circumstances force us to start over again sometimes it can be a good thing –

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 that might be a good thing because there's always hope that the new group of players might become even better than the last group, the loss opens the door for the possibility of something better – and that's a good thing.

And Naomi is returning back to God, to the promised land and she's bringing a Gentile into God's family – that's good.

But... we also need to understand that there are times when our losses are devastating – Like when a fire destroys a home and all personal belongings – those memories, scrapbooks, pictures, sentimental items... they are lost forever.

Or when someone loses a child to a car accident or an illness... then there is a hole 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 left you trying to pick up the pieces of your life and figure out how to start over again.

And 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 – but they do...

In spite of the fire prevention, driving carefully, taking our kids to the doctors for regular check-ups, and making vows to never leave our spouses... these kinds of losses still happen.

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 that's ok... now I have an opportunity to get a better one!!!"

And if you know someone who has experienced a traumatic 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 the bright side of their situation.

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 “well...maybe 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 – real traumatic loss... and you have to start over all you can do is wait. Wait and give things time because friends, 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!

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

At this point Hope has just floated to the surface, blllloop – 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, and 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

coping with a setback, and we think its better to be positive than negative – so we’re hopeful.

But friends, biblical hope, the hope of Christmas is a noun – it’s a thing, a place, or a person.

It’s real, it’s more substantial 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 actually 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” at Christmas time.

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 instructing his harvesters not to make any trouble for her...

No, we discover later in vs. 20 that Boaz is a relative of Naomi’s dead husband and that puts Him in a legal position of being Naomi and Ruth’s ***Kinsman-redeemer***.

“The LORD bless him!” Naomi says “He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead. That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers.”

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

But 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.

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

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...

It was his gift to them where they could have food and water, a 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 Israelites didn't just casually buy and sell land, especially their own family 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 kinsman-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 her and Naomi, He can do it for you! That it “just so happens” that what you need will come 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 becoming aware of that Hope friends starts with knowing that what God did for Ruth and Naomi eventually ended up making it possible for us to celebrate Christmas and bring Hope into our lives.

You see eventually Ruth married Boaz and she became the great, great, great, great grandmother of King David.

And David was a great King, who loved God, protected God's people and took care of them as He used to take care of his sheep.

And God made a promise to King David that he would always have an heir, one of his descendants ruling over God's people...

And the people of Israel looked for this promised Hope for many years when because of their unfaithfulness to God, they lost their freedom and their land.

The looked for a person who was a descendant of David who would come and give them freedom – He would be their Hope.

And many years later – it would just so happen that a Roman emperor wanted to take a census of the empire and ordered that everyone return to the town of their ancestors.

And one of King David’s descendants - Joseph would make his way back to Bethlehem with his fiancé, who happened to be pregnant with a child that was not his... and I’m pretty sure that you are familiar with how that story turned out.

The birth of Jesus friends, is the birth of Hope – this was the descendant of King David, through his stepfather Joseph who would become King of God’s people in a way that no one would have anticipated.

Jesus crowned with thorns. He was lifted up before his people... on a cross - but through his death He set God’s people free from their sins and paid the price for their rebellion.

And because Jesus was resurrected back to life – He will be King forever – God’s promise to King David is fulfilled!

In bringing Hope to Naomi and Ruth – God was setting the stage to continue the story with King David all the way to Jesus and friends... all the way to us.

Because “*as it turns out*” you’ve come to Valleyview this morning. And “*it just so happens*” that we are celebrating the second Sunday of Advent and focusing on Hope and hearing this story of how Jesus is King of God’s people – our King – our Hope.

And we know that Kings... leaders... people with power can do things for us. Look at how political parties in the US election said their candidate was the one who was the “Hope” for America if they were given the power of the presidency.

Friends Jesus is our King – He has the power to be our Hope in whatever situation we are in.

Look at the miracles he performed while He was on earth – can he not do that still? Of course He can – When we experience a devastating loss he can offer us whatever person, place or thing we need as we have to start over again.

He can cause hope to float up in our lives – just as He did for Naomi and Ruth – because Christ is God.

But friends, King Jesus is our Hope not just because He is God – but because He is our kinsmen-redeemer. He is related to us as it were...

The bible says *“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us.*

And do not forget that we were created in the image of God

So because Jesus is both fully human and fully divine He can purchase back for us and give us back that which we have lost, which is the shalom, the wholeness, the harmony, the peace between God, Humanity and creation.

Friends the truth of the matter is that we live in a world where devastating loss can take place in our lives and in the lives of others because of the curse we humans have brought upon it through our sin and rebellion.

And that’s a terrible realization to have – that we’re all connected spiritually in the responsibility for the evil plagues our world...

But as terrible as that is – it is equally encouraging and uplifting to hear that Christ has bought back this world for us – and that we are now only waiting for His return.

We have a solid hope in Him – and when we look around and see devastation and loss in this world, we know for a fact that one day that will be healed and made new again when Christ returns.

And all the little bits and pieces of hope which he brings into our lives in the meantime, those are hints and promises of what is yet to come!

That’s why we read Titus 2 this morning we it says

we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,¹⁴ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.

Friends that's where we are in the story now – we are waiting, we are anticipating the return of our Lord Jesus Christ – the Hope for the future of this world.

So friends – we are going to pray this morning, ask the Holy Spirit to bring that Hope – whatever we need it to be for where we are at in our lives – we are going to pray and ask, and expect that Christ will bring the Hope we need into our lives,

And that because He can do that, we will truly understand what it means that He is the Hope for our World.

Let's pray.