

## **Day by Day: Mother in Hard Times**

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael – May 10, 2020

5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Easter

**Readings:** Ruth 1:7, 11-14, 18-22; 2:1-3, 19-20; 3:1-5, 16-18; 4:13-17

**Reflection:** Psalm 113

**Music:** Precious Name; It Is Well with My Soul

**Greeting:** May the grace and peace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, be with you on this day! I pray that as we join together in worship, in whatever way we join together, that we be united by one Spirit, serving the Father, in the truth of the Son. Christ is risen! Christ is risen indeed! Alleluia!

**Music:** Precious Name

1. Take the Name of Jesus with you,  
Child of sorrow and of woe,  
It will joy and comfort give you;  
Take it then, where'er you go.

*Precious Name, O how sweet!  
Hope of earth and joy of Heav'n.  
Precious Name, O how sweet!  
Hope of earth and joy of Heav'n.*

2. Take the Name of Jesus ever,  
As a shield from every snare;  
If temptations round you gather,  
Breathe that holy Name in prayer.

*Precious Name, O how sweet!  
Hope of earth and joy of Heav'n.  
Precious Name, O how sweet!  
Hope of earth and joy of Heav'n.*

3. O the precious Name of Jesus!  
How it thrills our souls with joy,  
When His loving arms receive us,  
And His songs our tongues employ!

*Precious Name, O how sweet!  
Hope of earth and joy of Heav'n.  
Precious Name, O how sweet!  
Hope of earth and joy of Heav'n.*

4. At the Name of Jesus bowing,  
Falling prostrate at His feet,  
King of kings in Heav'n we'll crown Him,  
When our journey is complete.

*Precious Name, O how sweet!  
Hope of earth and joy of Heav'n.  
Precious Name, O how sweet!  
Hope of earth and joy of Heav'n.*

**Prayer:** Lord of Life, submitting to death, you conquered the grave. By being lifted on a cross you draw all peoples to you. By being raised from the dead you restored to humanity all that we had lost through sin. Throughout these fifty days of Easter we proclaim the marvelous mystery of death and resurrection. For all praise is yours, now and throughout eternity. Amen.

## Reflection: Psalm 113

*Praise the Lord! Praise, O servants of the Lord; praise the name of the Lord. Blessed be the name of the Lord from this time on and forevermore. From the rising of the sun to its setting the name of the Lord is to be praised. The Lord is high above all nations, and his glory above the heavens. Who is like the Lord our God, who is seated on high, who looks far down on the heavens and the earth? He raises the poor from the dust, and lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes, with the princes of his people. He gives the barren woman a home, making her the joyous mother of children. Praise the Lord! (Psalm 113 NRSV\*)*

We read the words of Psalm 113 and hear praise. From the rising of the sun until it sets. That God is unlike any other. That God helps the poor and the needy. That God pays attention to the outcast and the downtrodden. How does God give you joy? How do you praise God? How do you share your love of God? How do you help those in need?

**Prayer:** O God, our grove, our lover, our well. In the resurrection of your Son you have brought us into your garden. Train us to be heirs to your throne, that we may shield the needy. Help us in our patience. Strengthen us in our faith. Help us to find joy in you and to find joy in doing your good works. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

## Sermon:

Our scripture readings for today come from the New Revised Standard Version Bible. Our reading for today comes from various sections from Ruth.

*So she set out from the place where she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to go back to the land of Judah.*

*But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the Lord has turned against me." Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.*

*When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.*

*So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them; and the women said, "Is this Naomi?" She said to them,*

*“Call me no longer Naomi, call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty; why call me Naomi when the Lord has dealt harshly with me, and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?”*

*So Naomi returned together with Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, who came back with her from the country of Moab. They came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.*

*Now Naomi had a kinsman on her husband’s side, a prominent rich man, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, “Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone in whose sight I may find favor.” She said to her, “Go, my daughter.” So she went. She came and gleaned in the field behind the reapers. As it happened, she came to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.*

*Her mother-in-law said to her, “Where did you glean today? And where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you.” So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, and said, “The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz.” Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, “Blessed be he by the Lord, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!” Naomi also said to her, “The man is a relative of ours, one of our nearest kin.”*

*Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, “My daughter, I need to seek some security for you, so that it may be well with you. Now here is our kinsman Boaz, with whose young women you have been working. See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. Now wash and anoint yourself, and put on your best clothes and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, observe the place where he lies; then, go and uncover his feet and lie down; and he will tell you what to do.” She said to her, “All that you tell me I will do.”*

*She came to her mother-in-law, who said, “How did things go with you, my daughter?” Then she told her all that the man had done for her, saying, “He gave me these six measures of barley, for he said, ‘Do not go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.’” She replied, “Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out, for the man will not rest, but will settle the matter today.”*

*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.” Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom, and became his nurse. 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.*

*(Ruth 1:7, 11-14, 18-22; 2:1-3, 19-20; 3:1-5, 16-18; 4:13-17 NRSV\*)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Today’s reading is really a selection to highlight Naomi. I was drawn to the image of Naomi for many reasons this week. As I began to think about Mother’s Day, I started to think about moms in the Bible. There are a number of them and any could have been chosen for today. But Naomi reminded me of a few things that I felt like would be helpful to think about

right now. For one, Naomi was a mother in hard times. Really hard times. With the men of the family dead, she begins to head back to the homeland she had left behind. One might ask why I am looking at Naomi when the book is named for Ruth. Well, it is because Naomi has quite the journey. She lives through a time that left her bitter and sad. So much so that she literally says to no longer call her Naomi but to call her Mara, which means bitter. She has lost her husband. She has lost two sons. Times are hard. I'm sure she barely felt like a mother at that point. Now, if that were the end of Naomi's story we would certainly have a short message for today. She was upset and made it known. But that is not the end. That is how we begin. With Naomi grieving what was lost, returning to Bethlehem with Ruth the Moabite. Her words are those of one who has suffered a great loss.

Now, something that my mother helped me to learn was how to deal with loss. I think my father taught me how to understand loss, but it was my mother that helped me to learn how to emotionally deal with loss. Not just the big losses though. Big losses and small losses. Losses that feel bigger than they really are. Losses that we pretend aren't big things. I was reminded of this when I had to help Simon deal with loss. His loss was that the pool was not going to open this summer. He had talked about having his birthday party there, or at least one of the many birthday celebrations he has in mind. He *loves* the pool. He is all about learning to swim, about going down the big slide. Now, someone might think "that isn't a big loss, it's just the pool" right? It isn't nearly as bad as Ruth losing her family, why bring it up? Here's the deal. Simon is five years old. He has been talking about going to the pool since we drove by the pool the first day after it closed at the end of summer. He has spent months in his head planning on all the time he was going to spend there this summer. And now that is gone. So I thought about what I learned growing up. I don't know that my mother ever sat down and said, "here is how you deal with disappointment and loss" and handed me a manual. Life doesn't quite work like that. No, what I remember is when I was Simon's age and had big plans that didn't pan out. She acknowledged the loss. She named the grief. Then she would look to something good. She would look ahead. Maybe there was something fun we could do right then to remember that not everything was bad. Maybe it was just being there in that moment. But she would look ahead because there was always something on the horizon. The sun would rise again. So I took those memories in hand and talked with Simon. He was disappointed, but he was also looking ahead. When he was six, next summer, he would be able to go to the pool again. So he drew a picture of it, and he labeled himself as being six years old. I started to feel like maybe he had a better handle on naming loss and dealing with it than most adults I know. Do we deal with things like Simon? Like Naomi did? She knew what she had to do, so she kept going. But she didn't just ignore what happened. She recognized it, even the parts she didn't understand. She went away full and came back empty.

I started to think about how many losses we may not be recognizing right now. The most obvious is that when I speak these words, I mourn the loss that you are not here, sitting before me. I miss the Sunday routine. I miss the drive. The singing. I miss the community. I miss

having dinner with my big ol' family. I miss Bible study. I miss the park. I mourn those things, along with numerous other things. Big and small. We may try to act like things are normal, but they aren't. I know I have tried to. But I know they are not. We are all experiencing pains that we are not sure how to name. But we at least have to try. Because when we can name our loss, we can pray about our loss.

Now, Naomi was back in Bethlehem. But she wasn't alone. Now, here is something that reminded me of the moms in my life. Naomi didn't make the journey alone. Her daughter-in-law was with her. One of the two, Ruth. Because Ruth wouldn't turn back. Naomi laid out that she really didn't have a lot to offer. But she still cares for Ruth. She takes care of Ruth. Ruth was not her daughter, but she cares for her just the same. She doesn't really have the obligation to bring her along. But she cares for her anyway. My mother was mother to all sorts of people that she did not give birth to. She's taken in those that have married into the family with open arms. She takes them in before they get a chance to marry into the family. She has been mother to our friends growing up. I know that I have multiple mothers in my life because of the women who step up and take on that caring role. I am blessed to have them in my life, be it my own mother, those who have had the title of mother-in-law, or those who are called "Aunt" without any blood relationship. But they are family, and I cherish those relationships. Then there are all the "moms" that I have here in my church families. I am surrounded by mothers who may not even realize they have been mothers.

So, in the midst of this difficult time, Naomi still persists in helping Ruth to find a way to keep moving forward. Naomi lets Ruth go out to glean in the fields. She ends up in the field of Boaz. When Naomi finds out, she rejoices. She praises God for the good fortune that Ruth ended up in the field of a close relative. One that could "redeem" her by taking her as his wife. So she tells her to stay in that field. And Naomi plans on helping Ruth to win over Boaz and secure a place for her so that her future goes well. Ruth listens to her mother-in-law and things do go well for her. For both of them. Naomi knows that Boaz will act on the matter that day. And she is right. Again, she is right. So Ruth becomes the wife of Boaz. Ruth becomes pregnant and has a son. Naomi has next-of-kin. Naomi has hope. This woman who said that her name should be bitter because of how the Lord dealt with her? She is now praised. She is now told that God will be a restorer of life to her. The difficult time passed. The hard times were done for now. They might have pointed out that Ruth was worth seven sons, but they also point out that this person loved her. Which says a lot. Naomi's bitterness is once again joy. This woman who thought she lost everything now has a child that has been brought into her family. She's now a grandmother. Now she has so much more.

She made it through the difficult time. Through the hardship. Because she looked ahead. Because she didn't just stop. She moved forward and helped her daughter-in-law keep moving forward. She never stopped believing that God could help. Even when things were difficult, even when she felt like she couldn't understand God, she believed that God could do good. That there was still something left to be done. She never stopped being a mother in all of

the difficulty, and in some ways became a mother to all of Israel. Mother who brings about Obed. Which leads to Jesse. Which leads to David. A line that continues to Christ. Naomi persevered and persisted. She overcame hardships. She lived through a struggle. We can learn something from her in our own difficulty. A journey that began in darkness ends with light. A journey that began with loss has become gain. Sorrow has become joy. Not because she just waited for things to get better. She kept moving forward. She kept trying.

We are in a difficult time right now. We are all facing loss of various kinds, both big and small. Things are difficult on multiple levels. Things are different and we don't know when they will get back to normal. We don't know if things will go back to the normal we once knew. We have a choice. We could be still and sit and wait. Or we could keep moving forward. We could simply lament our loss, or we could lament our losses while moving forward into the future. Because God was with us before, God is with us now, and God will be there after. On this Mother's Day, I'm reminded of a mother's perseverance. A perseverance we all need right now. We could simply give up but we are called to do more. Even when we feel limited. When we feel like there is nothing we can do that will help. Like Naomi, we carry on. Even in hardship, God helps us to see what comes next. God helps us to see how we get there. In this Easter season, we remember that Christ gave all so that we would know we are loved and cared for. That a Savior came to set us free. That we overcome the bad to see the good. We overcome the darkness to see the light. That we help others when they are weak, and we take the help of others in our own weakness. Because we are all strengthened by Christ in times of trouble and hardship. Let us endure like Naomi, and let us carry on celebrating God and doing all that God has called us to do. Amen.

**Prayer of Confession and Pardon:** Lord, forgive us we pray. We come before you as those who have sinned against you in what we say and do. We come before you as those who have sinned against you in what we do not say and what we do not do. It is in our doings and our failings that we seek your grace and your mercy. We haven't loved you how we should. We haven't loved each other how we should. We are a people who are sorry, who humbly seek your forgiveness. Help us to live with one another in your mercy and your grace. Let us always remember the sacrifice made by our Risen Savior, Jesus Christ, that we may understand your deep love for us. May we honor that love by sharing it with one another, loving as you love and caring as you care. Help us to be of one body redeemed by one blood, serving one God. Amen.

**Offering:** If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed in the weekly update. If you are interested in online giving, please contact me. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

**Lord's Prayer**

**Music: It Is Well with My Soul**

1. When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,  
 When sorrows like sea billows roll;  
 Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to say,  
 It is well, it is well, with my soul.

It is well, with my soul,  
 It is well, with my soul,  
 It is well, it is well, with my soul.

2. Though Satan should buffet, though trials  
 should come,  
 Let this blest assurance control,  
 That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,  
 And hath shed His own blood for my soul.

It is well, with my soul,  
 It is well, with my soul,  
 It is well, it is well, with my soul.

3. My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!  
 My sin, not in part but the whole,  
 Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,  
 Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

It is well, with my soul,  
 It is well, with my soul,  
 It is well, it is well, with my soul.

4. And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall  
 be sight,  
 The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;  
 The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall  
 descend,  
 Even so, it is well with my soul.

It is well, with my soul,  
 It is well, with my soul,  
 It is well, it is well, with my soul.

**Dismissal with Blessing:** We are sent forth in the power of Christ's resurrection. Alleluia! The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Until we meet again. **Amen.**

**Prayer List**

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
John & Angie Veach	Diane Washburn	Bill Calvert	Eric Veach
Cathy Devall	Brock McMorris	Ed & Verna Titus	Hayden Kanizer
Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Laura Eubank Allison	Nancy Sowers
Dave Yaw	Aaron Carrell	Cindy Cisney	Patti Corder & Crew
Joyce Sly	Nancy Hoke	John Millsap	Larry Sidwell
Don Wells	Tricia Adkins	Ty Bradley	Ronnie & Elaine Carlen
Jerry Jackson	Pat Nebel	Don Stewart	Earlene Shupe
Brenda Hurt	Sharron Button	Anne Winkler Heinrichs	Family of Jerry Green
Family of Jerry Jackson			
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Nora Werner & Family	Wayne & Charlotte Carrell
Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Lois Woolever	Mary White	Nick Nichols
Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer	Martha Roberts	Charlie & Charlotte Baxter
Paul Schulte	Lyle Whitley	Tammy Fischer and Children	

Offerings may be mailed to your local treasurer or addressed to:

Rev Camron D St. Michael

PO Box 54, Charleston IL, 61920

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## **5/10/2020 Update from Pastor Cameron**

Greetings! Time for a weekly update!

I start with an apology, I had bigger plans for this week but ended up sick instead. However, I seem to be recovering just fine and don't seem to have had anything major. I'm still adapting my schedule to everything that is going on, and some days are easier than others. If anyone is needing special consideration, let me know. I am mailing this to those who have requested it and it is available at church locations for others. I have new guidelines that I am going over and will update you on in the coming weeks. This is not an easy time, as it gets harder to keep staying away because we see that what we have done is working. Because it is working, it feels like we are doing it for no reason. But we keep going because it matters, and because it is making us all safer. The bishop has outlined our plans for returning to the church building. The short version is that we are currently in phase two, and we will likely not return to having services until we are at phase 4 by the state standards for our region. This could be June, but it may be much later. I'll keep you all posted the best I can. My schedule has been rather full with school, as I've been helping the kids and doing remote learning as well. Putting these updates together with the weekly service and sermon take up much of the rest of my time, so I do apologize as I have not been able to reach out very much because of my situation.

In other update news, there have been a LOT of conspiracy theories and false information campaigns going around. According to scientists who work with viruses for a living, this was not a lab created phenomenon. This was not unleashed on us by some shadow entity. This was not planned. The stay at home orders are not a means of taking away civil liberties. This is not some big hoax. The numbers are real. Because we live in a less densely populated area, we will likely not see the kinds of numbers seen elsewhere. However, if everything suddenly went back to normal, those numbers would be high even here. The fact that we have had deaths in the area from the virus are enough to tell me that. Please, please know that there are reliable sources of information out there. Random people on the internet are not a source to trust. Know who is saying what you are hearing.

Annual Conference has been rescheduled Friday August 14<sup>th</sup> and Saturday August 15<sup>th</sup>. I will not be able to attend as of now.

I am still looking for pictures and music to share in services. I'm happy to share prayer requests, video, or anything you would like to share. We will have at least until June before we meet again.

As we continue in the current stay at home order, we are also facing economic problems. We must be prepared as a church to support each other and support those in need. This may have a longer lasting impact than the virus and I urge everyone to be in prayer. Also, be in contact with each other. Please check in on people and let us remain a close-knit community, even when we are practicing safe social distancing. Also, please be aware of scams involving door to

door solicitation and also over the phone calls about bank information. The IRS will not call you. Medical professionals will not come to your door. Please be safe.

I will be continuing to have our worship services online and in print! It is on YouTube and a link can be found on my website as listed below. I am also posting the information on the church Facebook page. If there is anything you would like to contribute, let me know! There will also be printed materials available at the churches to pick up. Please feel free to contact me for more information. If anyone is interested in doing music for any upcoming service, please let me know. There are many options for doing this. I can also share readings or any other video that you'd like to make part of the service. Participation is welcome!

Also, in this time we are still working to keep the bills paid, our missions supported, our apportionments met, and our outreach working. As such, we do need your continued financial support as part of the church. Offerings may be sent to your local treasurer or to the PO Box listed below. I can also arrange to pick them up if I am delivering anything to you. I am personally grateful for all your continued support in this difficult time. I cannot stress enough that the church is still active and we are still together.

If anyone is interested in online groups or interested in how to form one, I am available to help. There are free tools available to be able to still meet online for Sunday School or other meetings.

Please see the CDC website for information on the Coronavirus. If you do go out, please follow all distancing guidelines, and if you can, cover your face. Please let others know, and together we will all see this through safely. This is a very real and very serious pandemic. Please do not share false information about it. It only works to undermine the people doing the dangerous work of trying to keep us all safe. If you have any questions, I am happy to answer them or direct you to a source that can.

Please stay safe. You are all in my prayers. I will keep you updated as best I can. If you have any questions, feel free to contact your Church Council Chair or myself.

Rev. Cameron D St.Michael

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