

“On The Margins”

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Ruth 3:1-5;4:13-17

Mark 12:38-44

‘*And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi,*

*“Let me go to the field, and glean the ears of grain after him
in whose sight I shall find favor”...*

Ruth 2:2a

Let us pray... O God,

It is tough being on the margins –the sidelines of life.

Help us to make the most of wherever we are on our life journeys.

Amen

The story of Ruth continues with Naomi coaching her
about ‘how to get a man’.

Naomi tells her to “uncover Boaz’s feet” – the significance of which
would otherwise be lost to us if we didn’t use our imaginations.

But the outcome of whatever happened on the threshing floor
was a mixed marriage that would produce a line of kings,
beginning with King David and culminating with Jesus,
who is also called the Son of David.

Now, this would not be the first time someone used seduction
to influence a situation for their advantage;

But consider how often this is the only way
for people on the margins of society, especially when they are women,
seeking to get out of poverty – let alone survive.

Usually in the Bible, men are the main characters on the grand stage
where the “big doings” take place.

Meanwhile, women are on the periphery of the principle action,
yet when they are present, they are there for a reason.

In our scripture lessons today, *these women* are the heroes,
because of their strength *despite* their vulnerability.

More and more women are claiming their own role in our society,
participating right alongside men – whether the task is
menial or managerial.

But there is speculation that the role of men is simultaneously
in decline.

Willard, p.2

In the New York Times' review of the book, The End of Men, by Hanna Rosin, women's rise in the marketplace is attributed [to]
'... a devastating social collapse...[not] ...at "the top" of society...
but among *the lower and middle classes*,
because "*the end of men*" is [about]
the end of a manufacturing-based economy
and [many of] *the men who worked there...*
are now unemployed, depressed, [and] increasingly dependent
on the state and women to support them.'

Furthermore, this statistic is offered in support of this theory, such that
'In 1950, 1 in 20 men in their prime were not working;
today the number is a terrifying 1 in 5.'

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/16/books/review/the-end-of-men-by-hanna-rosin.html?pagewanted=all>

It is no wonder, then, that men feel threatened, fearful, and angry –
especially, white men who are still in the majority of this country.
To be pushed to the margins of power and influence
is not something anyone would willingly accept.
Such a situation can make any of us desperate enough to follow
those who say they have the answers –
and certainly this was a factor in the political scene of recent years.

There are people on the margins, but then there are people on the fringe –
the radical fringe of extremism, who talk tough
and sometimes openly, about violence, as a means to get their way.
The radical fringe can be either 'conservative' or 'liberal',
but they are about what is extreme –
and not particularly concerned about "the common good".
But to label any group as if they were the only problem,
is to play into the blame game of extremism.
And to be 'extreme' is not an absolute label for condemnation either
considering that Martin Luther King himself said
some things should be taken to extreme –
though he was talking about justice and peace.

What is the clear call? What is the answer? What is the way we seek?
I believe it begins by hearing that call that arises out of the margins –
that 'SOS', if you will, from those who have been marginalized,
rather than the strident bravado of the fringe.

Willard, p.3

These days, that call is coming from people along our Eastern Seaboard,
whose world has fallen apart and are having to make 'a way out of no way'
struggling to find shelter, food, and fuel for heat and transportation.
But we can take a lesson from those who have had to cope
with poverty as a long-term disaster recovery.

The clearest example for me has been the farmworkers' community of Dade City
called Caille de Milagros – Street of Miracles.

They formed an advocacy program decades ago to advise
immigrant farmworkers and their families about their rights.

Margarita Romo – who is Mexican-American, organized this program
along with a Sunday-school for children, meeting in an outdoor pavilion.

Those children have since grown up and now, they bring their children
to church in a building they own.

Though she has not had theological training,

Margarita has been practicing the most basic principles of organizing
as a Christian community – a 'beloved community'.

A little closer to home, has been the volunteer efforts of one of our new members,
Marilyn DeTizio, who herself, has ventured far from home to help
in an area of Mississippi ravaged by Hurricane Katrina back in 2005.

Marilyn has been volunteering for many years at Back Bay Mission
which is related to the United Church of Christ.

Here are some of her reflections for us:

*Back Bay Mission is a community outreach ministry of the UCC
serving the needs of the homeless, poor and disenfranchised for 90 years!
It's a varied and rich history.*

*In 1922 a group of women at a church on the front (gulf side) of Bilxoi
became concerned about the welfare of
the shrimpers and their families who lived on the back (bay side) of Biloxi.*

This small group of women started something big!!

*First attending to the needs of children, bringing them to church,
providing food and clean clothing.*

*That led to providing women with skills needed to enrich family life....
sound nutrition, cooking and sewing skills, attending to health issues,
and providing a "hand up rather than a hand out".*

Marilyn writes that it is her dream to organize and send a group from our church
to Biloxi for a workcamp week, saying:

I guarantee it will change your life forever!!

.....it stabs your heart and fills your soul.

Willard, p.4

Back Bay's mission statement says that, it is

...a community ministry of the United Church of Christ, [that] serves the Mississippi Gulf Coast and the wider church community by faithful witness for social justice and compassionate service to the poor and marginalized.

There's that word 'marginalized' again,

and we know that marginalization can be directed at anybody.

But it doesn't have to be that way...

Our newly elected president, Barack Obama, put it like this:

"I believe we can keep the promise of our founders, the idea that if you are willing to work hard, it doesn't matter who you are or where you come from or what you look like or [who] you love. It doesn't matter if you are black or white or Hispanic or Asian or Native American or young or old or rich or poor, able, disabled, gay or straight, you can make it here in America if you are willing to try."

American society has already changed and we are a mixed-marriage of many cultures.

As a denomination and as a congregation of the United Church of Christ, we are involved in the work of proclaiming God's radical welcome to everyone, no matter who they are or where they are on life's journey.

This was true for Ruth who was a foreigner as well as a woman who was widowed. She was in a desperate situation to find acceptance in an alien land and she had to make some hard choices to survive – and lucky for Ruth & Boaz, it turned out that they loved each other.

Their marriage is a vision of what could be –

a beloved community as a 'family' that isn't limited to blood kin or faction.

It is a vision of shared concern for all – that is not limited to the fringes, but calls for individual responsibility, sacrifice, and discipline.

It is a vision of there being room enough for everyone at the table of fellowship, where no one is a stranger left on the margins.

It is a vision of God still at work through us as the Body of Christ that is capable of being that Beloved Community on Earth as it in Heaven.

Willard, p.5

This is the message we have to offer The Villages and its environs –
especially, to those who are fearful about the future –
a ‘future’ we have already come to terms with
as a Christian congregation that is ‘open & affirming’.
This is why we give of our time, talent, and treasure.

On the 2nd Sunday of December, we’ll celebrate our 9th birthday as a congregation
when we first gathered to worship like those first Christian communities
who met in house churches.

We are now established with our own building, our own home,
a house of God amidst The Villages to proclaim
the Good News of a hopeful future.

Amen

*The story of Ruth continues with chapter 3:1-5 and chapter 4:13-17,
in which we learn of how the line of Israel's greatest ruler,
King David became established...*

One day, Naomi said to Ruth:

“It’s time I found you a husband,

who will give you a home and take care of you.

² You have been picking up grain alongside the women who work for Boaz,
and you know he is a relative of ours.

Tonight he will be threshing the grain.

³ Now take a bath and put on some perfume,
then dress in your best clothes.

Go where he is working,

but don’t let him see you

until he has finished eating and drinking.

⁴ Watch where he goes to spend the night,

then when he is asleep, lift the cover and lie down at his feet.

He will tell you what to do.

⁵ Ruth answered,

“I’ll do whatever you say.”

¹³ Boaz married Ruth, and the LORD blessed her with a son.

¹⁴ After his birth, the women said to Naomi:

“Praise the LORD!

Today he has given you a grandson to take care of you.

We pray that the boy will grow up to be famous everywhere in Israel.

¹⁵ He will make you happy and take care of you in your old age,
because he is the son of your daughter-in-law.

And she loves you more than seven sons of your own would love you.

¹⁶ Naomi loved the boy and took good care of him.

¹⁷ The neighborhood women named him Obed,

but they called him “Naomi’s Boy.”

When Obed grew up he had a son named Jesse,

who later became the father of King David.

Mark 12:38-44[CEV]

³⁸ As Jesus was teaching, he said:

“Guard against the teachers of the Law of Moses!

They love to walk around in long robes and be greeted in the market.

³⁹ They like the front seats in the meeting places
and the best seats at banquets.

⁴⁰ But they cheat widows out of their homes
and pray long prayers just to show off.

They will be punished most of all.”

⁴¹ Jesus was sitting in the temple near the offering box
and watching people put in their gifts.

He noticed that many rich people were giving a lot of money.

⁴² Finally, a poor widow came up and put in two coins
that were worth only a few pennies.

⁴³ Jesus told his disciples to gather around him. Then he said:

“I tell you that this poor widow has put in more
than all the others.

⁴⁴ Everyone else gave what they didn't need.

But she is very poor and gave everything she had.

Now she doesn't have a cent to live on.”