

### Reason vs. Love

Psalm 146

Hebrews 9:11-14

Mark 12:28-34

Ruth 1:1-18 (courtesy Vanderbilt Divinity Library)

1:1 In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and two sons.

1:2 The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion; they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there.

1:3 But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons.

1:4 These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. When they had lived there about ten years,

1:5 both Mahlon and Chilion also died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

1:6 Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD had considered his people and given them food.

1:7 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.

1:8 But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back each of you to your mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me.

1:9 The LORD grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband." Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud.

1:10 They said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people."

1:11 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?"

1:12 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,

1:13 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."

1:14 Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

1:15 So she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law."

1:16 But Ruth said, "Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; Where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God.

1:17 Where you die, I will die-- there will I be buried. May the LORD do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!"

1:18 When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

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This was a lovely gesture of Ruth's towards Naomi, but it was highly unreasonable. The only thing that had technically bound them together was their men folk - and at this point in the story, there are no men. The next logical step for these good, sad, weak, poor, socially disadvantaged women is to go back to their kin and hope someone will take care of them. But Ruth clung to Naomi and begged her not to force her to leave. She binds herself spiritually, emotionally and religiously to her Mother-in-law.

There is no reason mentioned as to why Ruth bound herself to her Mother-in-law and did not return to her own family, but for the sake of a lovely message about faith, we are grateful that she did. Ruth gives up her family, her faith, her country, and all the advantages therein and goes off into foreign lands with a poor widow,

without any promises for a future. It is for pure love of Naomi that Ruth won't leave her. And Naomi lets her come along.

Perhaps Ruth was concerned for Naomi's ability to make it back to her people. Naomi is bitter, and sad. She was once a wife and mother of 2 sons - in Judaic standards her life was considered good. Her future was secure as long as she had one even son alive. I remember when Prince Harry was born a friend of mine would say, "Diana can relax now, she has an Heir and a Spare!" Naomi belonged to no one now that her husband and sons were dead, so she had no one to care for her . . . but now she had at least a younger stronger woman by her side.

Let us not forget that in Moab, Naomi is a foreigner, and in Bethlehem Ruth is a foreigner. These are marginalized, powerless women who have nothing but their determination and their wits - and Ruth's faith. And Ruth isn't even on good terms with her God. She sees God as having punished her. She doesn't mention what for - but technically her sons should not have married "foreigners". And here she is bringing one of those foreigners back into the family fold! Everything about this arraignment is not based on good common sense.

So many times in our modern day faith we want to have religious laws to tell us how to deal with life. Questions about gay marriage, abortion, percentage of income to church donations, what to do about immigrants (legal or illegal) and similar social concerns - we want a black and white answer from the religious structure. This story of Ruth shows us that such answers are impossible to structure in a doctrine for the reason that faith and God are about Love - and what is truly loving doesn't always mesh with our human sense of reason and logic. Didn't we learn from Job that God's ways are beyond our human comprehensions?

The story of Ruth and Naomi is about *love* conquering over all the religious and social cracks of our society's justice systems, through which many people inevitably slip through.

Let's look quickly at the Gospel for today again:

One of the scribes came near and heard them . . . he asked (Jesus) "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" . . . Then the scribe said to him . . . "You are right, Teacher . . . *this is much more important than all whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.*" . . . [Jesus] said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God."

And from the Epistle we heard:

For if the blood of goats and bulls, with the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer, sanctifies those who have been defiled . . . how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from *dead works* to worship the living God!"

There is a reason these scriptures share the same day, because we are technically heading towards the end of the church year and beginning a new one with Advent on the 29<sup>th</sup> of this month, and it is time to shed what is false and focus on what is real and what is important.

If, in an unconscious, self absorbed way, we find ourselves following "the letter of the *law*" so that *we* will be saved, and yet we fail to follow the law of Love, all that we have done for our own salvation is no where near enough. Sometimes, Love calls us to be unreasonable. Sometimes we are called to step out of comfort zones.

There is a variety of repetition in the scriptures about Laws and very often "The Law" is slightly different in each text. We have all noticed some contradictory statements in our Bible. Joan Chittister writes about this saying:

The implication to be drawn from such a history is an important one: Law grows. Law changes. Or, to put it another way, we grow in love. We change the way we need to love. We broaden in our understandings of life and relationships and human community and justice . . . We come to understand that principles are more important than particulars. That in itself has something to do with the way we go about being a *loving people* rather than simply a legalistic one.

When I first heard that my dearest friend from college was gay I was already in seminary. I immediately read every book possible in order to learn how I was to react to this news. I was overwhelmed with facts and thoughts from all over the political and religious spectrum. One night I was in tears and prayed to God to help me to know what I was supposed to do, because I didn't want to have to stop loving him. And that was when I immediately felt like a light had gone on in the room - my burden was lifted and I went from tears to laughter - like God would want any of his children to stop loving each other. I knew my friend was a wonderful loving soul, precious to God *just as he is*. This was one of those moments when love was to conquer the unwritten societal understanding that some people came to see as a law - human 'reason' had nothing on the law of love.

The Law of love has so much power to change human lives forever and for the better. It was against the law and out of love that people risked their lives to save runaway slaves through the Underground Railroad and the civil rights movements. Remember - slavery is supported in some scriptures. So many times throughout human history we are called to think again and make decisions based on the love we see *exemplified* by God and Christ in our scriptures.

We are called as children of a loving, living God to contemplate how the 'Law of Love' may change our views on other issues. In light of our scripture for today dealing with foreigners, what would a God, who made this world with no boundaries, say about our immigrant situation today? Or our military build up? Christ came as a high Priest, he was seen to break Judaic laws, he preached love over laws, and he acted self sacrificially. He lived a life that was grounded in God - not one that was grounded in legalism. Are we?

And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, guards our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen