

Finding The Silver Lining

A Sermon on Ruth 1:1-19a

Year C - Pentecost 21

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JJ¹

Most of you are probably familiar with the Wisconsin insurance company West Bend Mutual Insurance. You're probably familiar with their slogan: *The worst things bring out our best. That's The Silver Lining.* It's their reminder to their customers and potential customers that they will be there to give you the best service possible when you face a disaster. That's of course with the understanding that your policy covers you for those events.

The phrase *every cloud has a silver lining* comes to us all the way from 17th century England (John Milton's *Comus: A Mask Presented at Ludlow Castle*, 1634). The whole idea is that there will always be some good that comes out of bad. And it is true. But this doesn't come from the knowledge of mankind. This idea is Divine. This attitude and knowledge comes straight from God. The Apostle Paul summarizes this thought in Romans 8:28 — "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

While we know and believe this promise, we often don't live as though it's true. It's so easy to see the dark clouds and focus on them. Sometimes the silver lining is hard to see. Sometimes it's shining in its

brilliance, but we refuse to acknowledge it. Today we are reminded that God does indeed keep his promise to use all things for our eternal good. Today we learn to simply trust this promise; **FINDING THE SILVER LINING.**

The book of Ruth takes place during the time of the judges. This was the time between Israel's entrance into the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua, and the time when Saul became Israel's first king. The time of the judges was not a good time in the history of God's Old Testament people. The book of Judges describes this time saying, "In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit" (Judges 17:6).

In addition to living in a land of lawlessness, there was a famine in the land. It's one of those sad ironies of Scripture when you remember that Bethlehem means, "the house of bread." Rain was not falling on central Israel where it normally would. Instead, abundant rains had strangely been falling on the other side of the Jordan River Valley, to the east, in Moab.

Elimelech moved his family to Moab because of the famine. While this was only a journey of about 60 miles, they were leaving their people to live in a foreign

¹ JJ is the acronym for *Jesus Juve*, which is Latin for "Jesus Help". It is a short prayer used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the beginning of their work.

land. While the Moabites were long lost cousins, descendants of Lot's act of incest with his older daughter, relations were not the best between these peoples. The Moabites are the ones who hired Balaam to put a curse on the people of Israel as they wandered in the wilderness. (Numbers 22 & 23) Their women seduced Israelite men into sexual sins bringing a plague from God that killed 24,000 Israelites. (Numbers 25)

It was here in Moab that calamity strikes the family. At some point Elimelech died, leaving Naomi alone with her two sons. Near the end of the 10 years living in Moab, the two sons who married Orpah and Ruth also died!

With nothing left for her in Moab and hearing news that the LORD had again visited the house of bread (Bethlehem) with food, Naomi decides to set off and return to Bethlehem. Now it was customary at that time for people to travel a ways with their important guests. It seems Naomi thought Orpah and Ruth were doing that very thing for her and that is probably why it wasn't until a ways into the journey that she said, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the LORD show kindness to you, as you have shown to your dead and to me. May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband."

Yet Orpah and Ruth weren't just being polite. They were ready to go all the way back to Bethlehem and live out their lives with their dear mother-in-law. But Naomi insisted that they return because the only way they'll have a life is if they remarry and it would be very difficult to remarry in Bethlehem. She insisted saying, "No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD's hand has gone out against me."

Naomi's insistence was meant for their good, but she steps over the line, blaming God for her grief. Our first thought is one of understanding. But to blame God, even get angry with God is sin. And how haven't we also felt just like Naomi? You who have lost a spouse know this temptation all too well. Those of you who have lost a child, or never had them at all know. You who have been victims of unfaithfulness

and divorce know. Those of you who have or are facing the loss of jobs know. Those of you struggling with poor health, illness or aging bodies know. Those of you disappointed in yourself or loved ones know.

We all know for different reasons and to varying degrees what it is to fall into the temptation that leads us to say, "The LORD's hand is against me." And this temptation sadly leads us to another temptation, the temptation which thinks, "God is doing this to punish me for something I did." All of which may final-

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ly lead to the temptation to become bitter with God and even despise him, ignoring his promises to us!

How forgetful, foolish even arrogant for us to think this way, even though we are not being treated as our sins deserve! Friends, when we become bitter with God, even forgetting his promises, let us repent. Let us repent of those sins, remembering that God doesn't punish us because he punished Christ in our place. Instead, let us **Find the Silver Lining** in every hardship and calamity we face knowing that God will work all things for our good!

And look at all the good God worked through the hardships these women faced! First the hardship of famine drove Naomi's family to Moab where they would bring two new daughters into their family. And more importantly, into God's family. Look at the blessings God brought about through their shared heartache of losing husbands which led one daughter-in-law to cling to her mother-in-law, never to leave her side.

You see, friends, faith believes and sees the LORD's blessings even in the darkest clouds of life! Look at Ruth. There was no way that she could leave the last person she had left of the people who brought her to the truth! Yes, by blood she was a Moabite, but no longer was she one in her soul. Her heart no longer belonged to Chemosh, the false god of the Moabites.

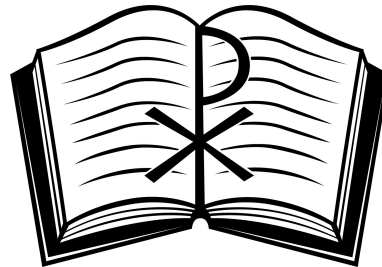
Her heart belonged to the LORD, the one true God. The God of the covenant. The God of grace and love.

In faith and love Ruth promises: "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me."

In Ruth's promises to Naomi, we see that she found **the silver lining** in all her troubles. By faith, she now belonged to the people of God and knew that she belonged with the people of God. But there was an even greater silver lining in all her hardships and troubles. And it was not a silver lining she saw until she reached heaven.

God used all these hardships and events in her life to bring her to Bethlehem where she would marry into the family of The Promise! Ruth is the great-grandmother of King David, and therefore a descendant of the Savior of the world! Ruth, a Gentile, is an ancestor of Jesus! Not only did God use her hardships for her own eternal good, God used them for the eternal good of all humanity!!!

Looking at Ruth's promises to Naomi we can't help but see God's promises to us. God has promised "Never will I leave



you; never will I forsake you" (Heb. 13:5). God says, "Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God." (Rev. 21:3). God has promised us that "neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 8:38,39). These promises of God give us the same confidence as Paul and his companions who declared in our second lesson: "[God] has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us..." (2 Cor. 1:10).

Sometimes God blesses us with the ability to see the silver lining right away. Perhaps we see the LORD allowing a hardship into our lives because we were heading down the wrong path. Thank him for that hardship! Sometimes the silver lining is the LORD simply drawing us closer to himself, like Paul said, "...this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead" (2 Cor. 1:9). How important that is to remember when the LORD calls our loved ones home to heaven. Part of the silver lining is knowing they are with the LORD forever and

God will raise them again! And not only that, one day we too will join them!

Sometimes we won't see the silver lining until after several months, many years or even until heaven. But whatever we may endure and suffer, know that God has his plan and it is perfect. Know that if no other silver lining can be found, we can still find it in his undying love for us! That same love that drew a Moabite woman into the family of God and the family line of Christ.

It's a beautiful phenomenon when you see that silver lining in the clouds of God's creation. You know a storm is brewing and you stand amazed at the mighty power of God displayed in that storm, but what sticks with you more than the sight of that dark thundercloud is the beautiful brilliance of sun illuminating the edges of that cloud from behind. Friends, when you face and endure the dark clouds and storms of life, remember to **find the silver lining**. Remember that the worst things of this life bring out the best in our God. Need proof? This sinful world killed its Savior. God used that wickedness to save the world! Friends, keep on **finding the silver lining** in all things as you cling to the promises of your God! Amen.

SDG²

² SDG is an acronym for *Soli Deo Gloria*, which is Latin for "To God Alone Be The Glory". This is a statement of humility used by many ministers and sacred musicians at the end of their work to let themselves and others know that it isn't about getting glory for themselves, but about giving all glory to God.