

**Each Loss Is the Grave of Something We Loved, and Every Grave Begs for a Resurrection.**

"Life has curled up into a big question mark" for Naomi and her two daughters-in-law, after the deaths of their husbands and her sons, and with famine in the land, the Rev. Dr. Brook Thelander said in his sermon Sunday. The question is, he said, "Who am I when I am no longer who and what I was?"

"As they launch out toward Bethlehem," he continued, "there are no miracles in sight to save them, and no angels on the road to point the way. Everything they had—and everything they ever thought they wanted—is now gone. They must now trust God to lead them into a world where there seems to be little place for them, no men to support them, and no institution to define them.

"It's not printed here for us, but as Naomi and Ruth enter the city, Naomi speaks out of the depth of her pain, and gives herself a name change. She says, 'Don't call me Naomi, but call me Mara, for I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty.' (In Hebrew the name Naomi means 'sweet,' and the name Mara means 'bitter.')

Speaking from her pain and loss, Naomi makes clear which is which. In an image that is hard for us to picture, she declares, 'God has raised his fist against me.'

"Our hearts go out to Naomi, don't they? And why? Because the pain she felt finds its way to each of *our* lives sooner or later. Loss—in any form—changes life at the root. It might be death or divorce. It might be a rejection. It might be abandonment. It might be a severe professional or personal setback.

"Whatever form it takes, as was the case with Naomi, we find that things we once took for granted are now shaken to the foundations. Emptiness becomes a close companion. God often seems more rumor than fact. We are tempted to add to Habakkuk's question from last week, 'How long, O Lord?' the additional question, 'Why, O Lord?' Why must the script be written this way?"

"Is there grace and Good News in this story? Indeed there is, but you must read on and read the entire narrative to see it fully. The 'logic' of God's providence is real, but it's not readily apparent at this stage. To see the grace in the midst of this episode, we might remember the words of C. S. Lewis, who said, 'God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains.'

"I think something of this is happening to Naomi in our text. Naomi . . . would grow to discover that while she could no longer be what she once was, she could be something (p. 2 →)



"St. Lucy before the Judge", the central of three panels of an altarpiece by Lorenzo Lotto (1480-1556). The Gospel reading this Sunday will be a lesson to persist in prayer, as illustrated by Jesus' story of the evil judge who eventually complied with the repeated requests of the widow. The Old Testament lesson advises persistence in thanksgiving, the Epistle lesson advises persistence in generosity, and the Psalm tells of God's persistence in his watching over his people.

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**Sundays** 10:00 a.m.: **Word & Table service: Harvest Festival**

11:30 a.m.: **Harvest feast** (bring salad or side dish, *and* dessert)

11:45 a.m.: Post-service discussion

6:00 p.m.: (First Sundays only) Choral Evensong, tea & refreshments

Thursdays: 6:30 p.m.: Evening Prayers. 7:00 p.m.: Singing & discussing hymns.

**Readings, 10/21:** Deut. 8:6-18; Ps. 121; 2 Cor. 9:6-15; Luke 18:1-8. **10/28:** Jer. 14:1-22; Ps. 84:1-6; 2 Tim. 4:6-8, 16-18; Luke 18:9-14.

**Prayer Emphases:** Honduras; Evangelical Presbyterian Church; Lowell, MS, First Church of the Nazarene, and the Rev. John Megyesi; Genesis Health Care, Boise; parishioners on Poplar Circle.

(**Sermon, cont'd.**) new. She would find that God could be present to her in her *emptiness* far more than she ever knew possible. In the meantime, . . . (s)he packed up and headed back toward Bethlehem. She did this not so much to find refuge in a family that was no longer there, but to be what she needed to be—not the wife of Elimelech, not the mother of Mahlon and Chilion, not the leftover piece of someone else's life. She went back to Bethlehem to become *herself* again. . . . Life's losses contain embedded within them a truth that can transform us. For each loss is the grave of something we loved, and every grave begs for a resurrection. Loss then can be the catalyst of newness, a doorway to dormant parts of us that can come alive at the hand of God who makes all things new. . . . (Naomi) would encourage us to trust the logic of God's providence, and to open ourselves to the presence of God in our pain and loss."