

Grace, mercy and peace be to you from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today in our Old Testament reading, we have a fairly familiar story. If you're somewhat familiar with the Bible, a couple of things that we're going to point out though. First of all, Ruth, the Moabite woman, when she comes to an end, her statement at the end, "May your God be my God, where you die, I will die and there I will be buried. May the Lord do so to me and more also if anything, but death parts me from you."

Now, we often have used that, a lot of people use that in their wedding vows or in the readings for the wedding, but this really isn't about husband and wife. It's not even really about mother-in-law and daughter-in-law. It really is a confession of faith before God.

See, both Orpah and Ruth were Moabites. Moabites are not Jewish, obviously, and they also do not worship the true God of Israel. They worship other gods. And so when they marry in this Jewish family, they were brought into the Jewish household, probably heard the faith of Naomi, of a Elimelech and of the two boys, and they understood the difference between their gods and the God of Israel.

But when the father died and when the two boys died, they were left a widow and her daughters, and there was no hope for them to gain a living or to survive on their own. They needed to find help from strangers. Now, Naomi, knowing the Israelite law, said that the owners of land and property should be careful to leave extra for those that are poor.

Naomi knew that Israel would take care of her Partially because she was Jewish like them. She wasn't certain they were going to take care of her in Moab because she was a foreigner. She intended to go back to Israel and her two daughters-in-law started to follow her.

But she said, "What am I? I don't have anything to offer you. I'm never going to have boys again that are going to grow up old enough for you to marry them. Go back to your families, find new husbands." They resist for a time because they really truly loved Naomi.

But Orpah went back. Ruth did not. They both loved Naomi equally well, but Ruth, Ruth made more than a confession of love for her mother-in-law. She made a confession of love to the true God of Israel. She made a confession of faith. Her statement about, I'm going to go where you go. Your people are my people. Your God is my God. That's the core right there. The word of God worked within her and she became part of the family of God in that instance.

So much so, that if you're careful in reading this, Ruth ends up becoming the grandmother of King David because Ruth ends up marrying a Jewish man named Boaz, and they have at least one son named Jesse. And Jesse has several sons, the

youngest one being David. Ruth, a Moabite who has no Jewish blood in her becomes an ancestor of not only King David, but of Jesus himself.

In fact, of the few, only four women that are listed in Jesus's genealogy, there's only four women listed, and Ruth is one of them. A Moabite. The other ones are just as interesting. Rahab, the prostitute, and Bathsheba who had an interesting beginning of a relationship with David, and then Mary. Those are the four women that are listed, and Ruth is in there. Why? Because the word of God is universal. It's for all people. It's not just for the elect.

It's not just for those of us who are sitting here in the pews. It is for everybody. And in fact, that is our job as Christians to share the message with the world around us. As Paul encourages his young protege Timothy, to be strengthened by the grace of Christ Jesus and to proclaim the word of God to faithful men, that they might proclaim it to the world and to share in his suffering and be a good soldier for Christ. Good soldier for Christ. Onward Christian soldiers.

Now we need to be very careful because whenever you talk about soldiers and Christianity, you get all sorts of weird ideas and strange combinations. We need to unpack this a little bit. We are as, if you looked at the little subtitle above Onward Christian Soldiers, it was called the Church Militant. And that is what you and I are. We are part of the church militant.

Now, in some ways it feels like the church is getting smaller. The pews aren't quite as full as they used to be. Churches seem to be getting smaller and smaller. We seem to be closing down churches and all of this. And so there's a lot of sometimes despair that the church is dying and getting smaller. But the reality is the church never ever gets smaller. We just transfer our membership from the church militant to the church triumphant.

The church is still every single person who has called upon the name of the Lord from Adam and Eve all the way to today. That's the church triumphant and the church militant. Now, when we are the church militant, we have a job to do and that is to be good soldiers for Christ. But what does that mean to be a good soldier of Christ?

It means as a good soldier obeys the orders of those that are over them and those that have enlisted them, we also obey the orders of the one who has enlisted us. And who is that? Of course, God through Christ Jesus. And when were we enlisted? When we heard of the word of God in our baptisms, more often than not, we were enlisted into the family. We were enlisted into the church militant.

And we have a job to do as good soldiers for God. We wear armor just like regular soldiers do. Not physical armor, but the armor of God, the breastplate of righteousness, helmet of salvation and the rest of it. We also have a weapon that

we use. A sword. Not a physical sword to force people convert or die, or convert or I'll beat you up and make you feel guilty from the law so bad that you finally just give up and confess. That's not our sword, that's not our weapon.

The weapon of the church militant is of power and love and self-control, as we read last week. The sword of the Spirit is the word of God. It is the word of God that conquered Ruth and brought her into the family of God into the church militant. It is the word of God that worked through Timothy's grandmother and mother and brought him to the faith and caused him to receive the call, to be a pastor unto the people, to proclaim the message of God, be taught by Paul and move forward. And it is the word of God that saved these lepers as well in the New Testament, which we're going to get into in a minute.

But we are called to be soldiers, which means we are called to bear witness to the word of God. We are to fight. Again, not to beat anybody up, but to fight in love. To love our neighbor as ourselves, to be generous and kind and loving to even our enemies, to pray for our enemies, to forgive them seven times 70 times. To take the log out of our own eye before we try and take the splinter out of somebody else's. To be humble, to be kind, to be generous so that we might declare the gospel and the word of God to those that we had come in contact with and to be focused upon that and that alone.

Now we live in this world. And in this world we have our different callings or vocations. As citizens, we are called to exercise our Christian faith in our role as citizens. We are to pray for those who are in authority over us. We are to vote properly according to our conscience and our faith, and we are to strive for a better world, just laws and a kind society.

But that's not our primary goal. It's wonderful if that happens, but Christianity takes place in all countries, in all governments, in all situations. Governments that are supportive and open to us, and governments that are oppressive to us. Our message and our job never changes. Be faithful to the word of God. Learn the word of God, grow in the word of God so that you might be a good soldier for Christ.

And if that happens, that the culture then supports you in that blessed it be the name of the Lord. And, of course, we pray God would help us in that. But if not, if the culture around us and the government around us is oppressive and persecutes us, what are we called to do? Same thing. Take up your cross and follow me. Proclaim the word of God. Serve him in all things. Love your enemies, including the enemies that maybe persecute you and maybe even throw you in jail, or in the early Christian Church, throw you to the lions. Pray for them because that is our mission.

Those are our marching orders to suffer for the sake of the gospel, to focus upon the word of God and to give thanks for his salvation so that others might see the joy of our salvation, might see the power of God's word in our lives and come to know our Savior. Just like Ruth came to know Naomi's Savior. Just like this leper came to know his Savior, Jesus Christ. Ten lepers cried out to Jesus. 10. And you need to remember this, all 10 were cleansed. All of them were cleansed. Nine of them started going to the priest because they had to show themselves to the priest to be brought back into the society.

The Samaritan, on the other hand, recognized that God was there with him and he went the source and thanked Jesus for his healing because he understood that that is where God was present and that is where the community was formed. The other nine were healed of their physical leprosy, their physical ailment, and they were brought back into their community much like Orpah was brought back into her community, a Moabite. She loved her daughter-in-law, but she was not focused upon God himself.

Same thing with these nine lepers. They loved the fact that they were healed and they were anxious to get back into the culture of the world, but they missed the opportunity to be grafted into the kingdom of God. Only the Samaritan understood and only he was restored back to the community. Not to the physical human community, but to the community of God, the church. And it was the word of God that did that for him.

Remember all 10 were healed. When we read Jesus's words, he says, "Now, no one found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?" And he said to them, "Rise and go your way. Your faith has made you well." All 10 were healed. It's not like only he was healed. But what does Jesus mean? Your faith has made you well. Jesus isn't talking about being healed for society in the here and now. He's talking about being healed for all eternity.

The nine were healed and brought back into society, but eventually they all died. And whether or not they're part of the kingdom of God or not, we don't know. But this one was healed of his physical ailment, but his faith in the fact that God was present in Christ healed him of his spiritual ailment. Of the sin that was more rotten to his core than even the leprosy. And it is his faith in the Creator, in the God who spoke to him that made him well for all eternity and brought him out of just dwelling in this world to being part of the true of the kingdom of God where he will join with us in the church triumphant to give glory to God.

What are we called to do as the church militant? Look to your vocation. Look to your calling. Are you a brother, a sister, a mother, a father, a neighbor, a friend? How do you then live your life in Christ in those places? We're also citizens. We're

called to act in this world and work in our government as best as we can, however we can. To vote according to what we believe to be true, to speak to the truth.

Whether or not the culture follows us or not that's not the important part. The important part is we are faithful. And if we are faithful, then hopefully some will come into the kingdom. I would love to have a wonderful utopian society where our government is in line with the word of God. That'd be great. But even if we had that government, that still would not solve the problem. The real problem of sin. And sin can only be solved by the word of God and being brought into the kingdom of God, which is not of this world, and that kingdom will last for all the eternity.

You are part of the church militant right now, and eventually you will be part of the church triumphant. In the meantime, we celebrate with them, we rejoice with them. We get a foretaste of the feasts that they are celebrating to strengthen us in our journey. When we suffer, when we struggle, when we're dealing with hardship and persecution, when our society seems to be against us, we are nourished by his word and strengthened and protected by the armor that God gives to us. And the sword of the spirit, which is the word of God, which gives us hope and confidence and peace to know that if we have died with him, we will also live with him.

If we endure in his word, we will also reign with him. But if we deny him, he will deny us. Even when we are faithless he remains faithful for he cannot deny himself. God is faithful to you and to me. He has promised if we call upon his name, we will be saved. Ruth was grafted into the family of God, even into the lineage of Jesus Christ. This Samaritan leper was grafted into the community of God. The people that Timothy preached to were brought into the kingdom of God.

And we also bearing faith and good confession can hopefully draw others to God's word and the comfort and the grace and the peace that we have because we know our faith has made us well. When we die, we shall live again and we will be restored, and we will be at peace for all eternity. That is the kingdom that we are a part of. That is the kingdom that we are soldiers of.

Trust him, serve him, thank him because he's faithful and he will never leave you nor forsake you. May his grace and his mercy and his peace be and abide with you always now and forevermore unto life everlasting. Amen.