

## Covenant

One of my favorite biblical stories is from the book of Ruth. It's a text that lifts up the power of relationship. It's a story of commitment, love, respect, faith, deep trust and what it means to stick it out through hard times.

The story takes place during a time of hunger, a time of famine and scarcity. A time in which one family has experienced unbelievable tragedy. Naomi and her three daughter in laws are at the end of a long string of death and misfortune. All of their husbands have died. With a heavy heart, Naomi is preparing to return to her home, alone, without her husband and her sons.

She is facing isolation. How has her life taken such a turn? Where is her support system?

As she begins her journey, her daughter in law, Ruth approaches her. Ruth sees Naomi's brokenness and tells her, don't worry. I am with you. I made a covenant with your family. You are not alone. Wherever you go, I will go with you. You will not return home alone. Ruth says, "You gave me your son, and I joined my life with your family's life. Our hopes and dreams lie broken, but we are still in this together."

This is where we find ourselves now. This is a time of hunger, a time of famine and scarcity. Our hopes and dreams lie broken. Our politics are broken. Fear and mistrust of the other surround us. This country is deeply divided. How often do we turn off the radio, the television,

weary of the ugly messages about immigrants? How much hatred and ugliness is being spewed during this election season?

How do we contradict this vitriol that eats away at our social fabric? How can we say, like Ruth, we are still in this together? We still believe in our covenant, and we are committed to act upon this covenant our ancestors, who built this country, handed down to us. Because it us up to us to be like Ruth.

We realize the covenant in our shared work COPA. We created this covenant almost two decades ago and we continue to deepen and strengthen this covenant over these many years together. In our relational meetings, when we share our stories of real life challenges, our hopes and our dreams, we say, like Ruth, we are in this together. We have a claim on each other's time and resources. This is how we contradict the selfish trend of "me first" politics that fills the airwaves and media outlets.

Every time we speak to our city council members advocating for affordable housing, we are acting like Ruth. When we hold law enforcement and the District Attorney's office accountable around Prop 47, we are acting like Ruth. When we secured funds to expand health care services to the uninsured and undocumented residents of Monterey County we acted like Ruth. When we say that no life is disposable and we fight for those who are discarded by our unjust criminal justice system we are acting like Ruth. And when we say no to greedy lenders who prey upon low income families with obscene interest rates, we act like Ruth.

Just like Ruth we are bound together through the covenant of mutual responsibility. Politics has become a dirty word. It has reached a new low in our country and it is high time we act upon the covenantal vision of our ancestors. We are here today to say that relationships matter and we won't buy the idea that we need to make it on our own.

When we act unselfishly towards each other we are living the covenant. When we say that what troubles you also troubles me, we reject isolation and despair. We say no to fear and separation and we embrace a shared vision of the world as it should and could be.

Today we are giving voice to this covenant we have built with one another, we are putting it on display and telling its story. We are making our sacred text real. We act upon this covenant day by day, through hours of relational meetings, research actions, investment conversations. But today, we are celebrating the fruits of our work.

Ruth and Naomi return to Naomi's home just in time for the barley harvest, and together they shared in the harvest. This is what we are doing here today. Look around you for a moment and recognize all of the hearts and hands that have worked hard to build this covenant. We have been together in this journey of commitment and dedication and we are so grateful. We say a word of thanks for this covenant of mutual obligation. May we continue walking this path together with hope, courage, wisdom, strength and gratitude.