Spirituality
Pencil Preaching





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“Wherever you go, I will go” (Ruth 1:16).

Ruth 1:1, 3-6, 14b-16, 22; Matt 22:34-40

The complexity of the genealogy that leads to the birth of Jesus Christ reveals that Providence does not obey human morality or blood purity to achieve its purpose. The path of the divine will wends its way through successive generations of human desire, both honorable and lustful, righteous and sinful, to fashion a love story for the Incarnation rich enough to represent us all in our need for redemption. Among the long list of “begats” (Matt 1:1-16) beginning with Abraham are Tamar by incest, Ruth the foreigner, Bathsheba by adultery, Rahab the prostitute, and Mary of Nazareth, virgin spouse of Joseph. Sin and Grace meet in Jesus the Savior.

The story of Ruth, the widowed Moabite woman who attaches herself to her mother-in-law Naomi, is one of the Bible’s great love stories. By marrying Boaz, Ruth becomes the great grandmother of David. Her devotion to Naomi gave us the poetry read at so many weddings: “Wherever you go I will go, and wherever you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God” (Ruth 1:16).

Love finds a way. Only in hindsight, looking back over a lifetime at the decisions made for love do many couples see the hand of Providence. Without those decisions, everything that followed would have been different. Without the timing, the

circumstances, the small miracles and graces, lovers might have missed the chance meeting, the sudden heart-leaping conviction, the adversity that deepened their determination, the adventure that opened a hundred doors into an unknown future. Without Ruth’s decision to go to Bethlehem with Naomi, the entire story of salvation would have been different.

It is no surprise that human love teaches us how to love God and our neighbor. Today’s Gospel lifts both Jesus and the scholar of the law sent to test him into the thrall of reciting the First Commandment. The foundation of the Law is the invitation to love God with “all your heart, all your mind, all your soul and all your strength.” Within the embrace of that love, we know we exist only because of God’s love and are destined to return that love to God for all eternity. Grounded in this mystery, we learn to love ourselves and our neighbors as ourselves. There is no greater truth or purpose in our brief lives in this world.

It is also no surprise that this mystery was revealed to us not as a set of rules or a program of discipline but in a person. Jesus is God’s love-made-flesh; God’s Word incarnate. The love story he chose to live makes possible our love stories. This is the joy of the Gospel.

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