

July 14th: Road

Good morning again, traveling companions. We have begun a new journey together—our summer sermon series titled “Dis[place]d: Finding Home Together.” This series is meant to be a sojourn into the biblical story, and a tool to help each of us identify the displacement in our own lives, so that we might find comfort in God’s promise of a future home.

When Pastor Heather introduced this topic, she defined this concept of displacement for us, saying that to displace something is to remove it from its usual or proper place, and this can apply to both tangible things like individuals and intangible things like emotions. Displacement can be temporary or permanent, but often the same underlying feelings apply to this sense of disorientation and confusion. So if you are with us this morning and identify with any of those feelings, or are going through an experience of displacement in your life, we invite you to enter into this time of meditation with an openness to God’s presence and the peace that is waiting for you in this place.

Our reflection this morning will be brief so that we can focus on our Vision Update, but before we get started, let’s take a deep breath and pray before we see what God has for us.

God of all paths, you go behind us, before us, above us, below us, and beside us. Everywhere we go, we find you with us. On difficult roads, with difficult choices, we look for signs that your presence is guiding us forward, we are in need of your divine wisdom. Be with us now, as we meditate on your word and look for answers for our own lives, may we sense that you love us and lead us into new places and spaces with hope and liberation. Amen.

Last week, in our passage from Exodus and the life of Moses, we talked about what it looks like to be displaced by shame—how it feels to withdraw from relationships or cut ourselves off from community because of the vulnerability or fear that we have inside of us.

But this week, I want us to look at a kind of displacement that is rooted in a more positive emotion, because I think scripture shows us that displacement can be caused by the full spectrum of human emotion. In particular, I want us to consider that in this story from the Old Testament book of Ruth, our main character responds to a situation of change and confusion with deep courage, and therefore her experience of displacement is powerful and transformative, rather than disempowering and discouraging.

Over the next few minutes, I want us to ask ourselves: **what does it look like to be displaced with courage?**

The beginning of our passage, found in Ruth chapter 1, gives us some background about this situation—the first few verses tell us that because of a famine, a family of Israelites migrates from Judah to Moab, and once they settle there, the two sons find Moabite wives. But tragedy strikes, and both the father and his two sons are killed, leaving Naomi and her two daughters-in-law to fend for themselves. In such a time of uncertainty and grief, it would have made sense for these women to respond to this situation with defeat—anyone who has been widowed or lost a partner or grieved the death of child will know that this must have been a traumatic and emotionally devastating sequence of events. And it would be a long road, a long walk to Judah.

But out of their loss, we see that all three of these women are bolder and more brave than expected.

When Naomi makes the decision to return to Judah, she encourages Ruth and Orpah to remain in their homeland and find new husbands—and Orpah does choose to stay in Moab, but Ruth commits herself to Naomi in a way that would have been quite unusual at the time. Choosing to stay with Naomi, and choosing to migrate to a foreign land is not something that would have guaranteed Ruth a safe life or a happy ending—but Ruth remains convinced that this is the best course of action.

As Ruth readies herself for this journey and the long road ahead, she uses very passionate language to describe her commitment to Naomi, saying, “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 even death separates you and me.”

This the path she is going to take, and nothing will change her mind.

And this commitment and courage changes the course of Ruth’s story, but it also changes our biblical story. When you look at the Gospel of Matthew in our New Testament, and you open the very first chapter of that book, you’ll find a genealogy that connects Jesus to the ancient patriarchs. And in that genealogy, you can see that Ruth is listed in that family tree. Very few women are listed in that genealogy, only four by name, and five total, and yet Ruth is one of those women whose lives are written into the record of Jesus’ birth. Ruth, a Moabite woman, a foreigner who makes her way into Israel, becomes a link between the ancestors and our Savior.

When Jesus spoke to his disciples about their faith and their history, he could point back to women of courage who were instrumental in shaping their religion and nation into it’s current state. When the Jewish community gathered for festivals and rituals, they could look at their common story and see that bravery was woven into their narrative.

So here’s what I want you to know: courage in the face of grief or loss is a powerful thing. Courage in the face of uncertainty or desperate circumstances is a commitment that pays off big time. Courage has lasting consequences, not just for ourselves, but for our community. Courage doesn’t just transform us and our experiences, it can transform our family for generations to come. Courage isn’t just a one time emotion, but a choice that can alter the course of history.

That might sound grandiose, but I promise you it's just as true for you as it was for Ruth. It could be big or small, but courage makes an impact.

For you, this could look like having the courage to pursue a new career path or start a new job, it could look like having the courage to reach out and build a new support system or make a new friend.

It could look like having the courage to parent your children in a way that goes against the unhealthy dynamics of your family of origin, or healing yourself so that you can give of yourself more fully in that parenting role.

It could look like having the courage to leave an abusive partnership, or having an honest conversation with your spouse about something that needs to change in your relationship.

It could look like having the courage to make a difficult health decision that you know is the right choice but feels unfamiliar or scary.

So if you're going through an experience of displacement right now, you might be wondering—how can I have this kind of courage? What do I need to do to be like Ruth? Well, there are three things that I think you can reflect on and take into your week.

First, courage isn't just a reaction that takes you away from an experience, it's a commitment to a different experience. Courage isn't an escape from a situation, it's a calling that you feel to take action to change a situation. Where is that calling for you? Where do you feel compelled to take action or make a change?

Second, courage isn't something that we do by ourselves. Sure, courage is a feeling or choice that you can make, but courage works best when it is rooted in faith. Courage that is connected to God's hope and God's promises is stronger than hope or promises that humans can provide. How connected do

you feel to God's love and presence? What could you do to draw closer to God before you make a courageous decision?

And finally, courage isn't just for today, it's for forever. When things get really tough in our lives, and we feel overwhelmed by the day to day, sometimes it helps to remind ourselves of the bigger picture. Life might feel chaotic, and it might feel like our daily routines are meaningless, but how we spend our days is how we spend our lives. Little acts of courage will have a ripple effect through the rest of our stories. What bigger picture are you working towards? What dreams could come true if you have the courage to take this next step?

My friends, in our ways and in our own spaces, we have the ability to be like our biblical characters. Each of us has the potential to be a Ruth, a person who points the way to Jesus. The road we are might be long, but we belong to a lineage of courageous people.

Amen.