

**3/18 Sermon: Like a Rock (Secure) PASSION: Relationships that are Personal, Active, Special, Secure, Inspiring, Overwhelming, Near and Always New**

Ruth 2: 18-23

John 15: 1-7

The weather this week has given us a great example of what it is to be secure, to know that our footing is secure, like a rock. This past week started out to be a lovely introduction to spring, which officially arrives later this coming week. And then, Friday morning came. Much to the joy of many children, school was cancelled, because the driving conditions were insecure – the combination of dropping temperatures, precipitation that was cycling between freezing rain, sleet, and snow, and the windy roads and steep hills and valleys we have out here all made the local superintendents decide better safe than sorry. Many commuters decided that was good advice, and they decided to stay safe and secure at home, telecommuting. The snow plows and salt trucks were out in full force, to make driving secure. Yesterday Stanly, Anna and their little crew were here, among other places, plowing and shoveling to make sure that our footing would be secure today. Many of us shoveled our walks and drives, so that we would feel safe and secure getting in and out of our cars, and walking into and out of our houses. We were trying to make sure that our footing would be secure and solid, like a rock that is firmly anchored.

Security matters to us as human beings. We aim for some measure of physical security, when we lock our car doors and houses at night. We aim for some measure of financial security through savings accounts and retirement plans. We aim for some measure of psychological security, by developing our friendships and by staying close to family members who care about us, and who we care about. As Freedom Tower is being rebuilt on the site of the Twin Towers, they are carefully installing foundational extensions into the bedrock far below the surface of the land, so that the building will be grounded on bedrock. Jesus uses the metaphor of building on rock when He gives Peter his new name, Cephas, which means “Rock,” when Jesus says that upon this rock will He build His church. Even advertising keys in on this desire for security – back in the 1990s Chevrolet used a Bob Seger song, “Like a Rock,” to describe the reliability of their pickup trucks. The Prudential Insurance Company used to advertise that those who invested in their company were purchasing a “piece of the rock.”

Ruth and Naomi are looking for that sort of security in today’s reading. Ruth has returned from her first day of gleaning, with a very large amount of barley – almost half a bushel. Naomi is impressed, and asks Ruth where she had gleaned that day. She figures, correctly, that someone had been kind to Ruth – someone had noticed Ruth, and she blesses that man. Ruth fills her in – she has been working in the fields that happen to belong to Boaz, who, as Naomi tells her, happens to be one of THEIR nearest kinsmen. This is interesting, this identification of Naomi with Ruth – Naomi says, “*The man is a relative of OURS, one of OUR nearest kin.*” Remember, when Naomi and Ruth first returned to Bethlehem, she doesn’t even acknowledge Ruth’s existence to the women who greet them. She complains about how God has dealt bitterly with her, and that she should be renamed “Bitter,” instead of Naomi. When Ruth first goes out to glean, Naomi is almost dismissive of her. But now, for the first time, Naomi acknowledges the real relationship between her and Ruth – OUR relative, OUR nearest kin. Ruth started out promising Naomi that she would never leave her nor forsake her; perhaps Naomi didn’t really believe her at first. But Ruth’s actions have backed up her words, so perhaps Naomi is feeling more secure in her relationship with her young Moabite daughter-in-law. She is starting to see some possibilities for the future – they have a place to stay, they have food to eat, they are

physically safe, as long as Ruth stays in Boaz' fields, under his protection. As the seven weeks progress, the time from the beginning of the barley harvest to the end of the wheat harvest, the women are experiencing a little more security. Their situation is still not solid, but it is better, and they are beginning to get into some sort of normal routine, which also helps them to have a sense of security.

Jesus is also focusing on security in this section of His discussion with His disciples, but Jesus is not focusing on physical security, or routines. Instead, Jesus is talking to them about the security that comes from being in relationship with Him, and through Him, being in relationship with the Father. Jesus is urging the disciples to abide in Him – to rely on what they know of Him, to follow Him, to stay securely anchored in Him, even as they prepare to go out into the world. The disciples don't have to depend on their own smarts to carry them through in this mission; they need to depend on their relationship with Jesus. He is the vine in whom they have their existence. Just as a branch draws its nourishment from the vine, as long as it is attached to vine, so too are the disciples to abide in Jesus and depend on Jesus as their life-source. The secret to abiding in Jesus is to have His words in their hearts, and to live out those words. If they do that, they can rest secure. Pruning happens – but the pruning that God does is to make the branches even more fruitful. The vine is the source of life for its branches. As long as the branches are a part of the vine, producing good fruit, they will be healthy and cared for. They will be secure.

What do we draw our security from? The security, the abiding, that Jesus is talking about with His disciples is more than just the physical and psychological security that Ruth and Naomi are beginning to experience. Those things are necessary, but they are not sufficient for us to abide in Jesus. Jesus tells us, too, that ***“If we abide in Him, and if His words abide in us, we can ask for whatever we wish, and it will be done for us.”*** If His words abide in us, we can ask for whatever we wish, and it will be done for us. His words can abide in us if we study them, if we read scripture, and see what Jesus was concerned about, if we pray, and if we act in the way Jesus would have us act. We can ask for what we wish because if Jesus abides in our hearts and minds and souls and strength, we will ask for what He wants us to ask for, as His followers. This is not about asking for the latest iPod or gaming system or fully loaded car. This is about asking what His will is and doing it. The vine brings forth fruit according to the kind of branch it is part of. If we are a part of Jesus, if we abide in Him, we will bring forth the kind of fruit He brought forth, as He abode in the Father here on earth. What sort of fruit did Jesus bring forth? He brought forth fruit of integrity, of faithfulness, of compassion, fruit grounded in the love of God. He brought forth fruit that showed concern for the poor and the disabled, the sick and the dispossessed, the marginalized of society, like lepers and tax collectors and women. He brought forth fruit that was willing to challenge the culture to return to its own roots and be the blessing to the world that the Chosen People were to be. And He asks us to do the same, if we abide in Him.

When we abide in Him, we are like a house that is built on solid rock; when the floods come and the rains come, that house stands, because it is built on rock. When we abide in Him, we can rest secure, because our life flows from His, because we are branches of the vine that is cared for by His Father, by our Father. So let us be secure, like a rock, like a flourishing vine, bearing good fruit, until He returns in glory. Even so, come soon, Lord Jesus. Amen.

Ruth 2: 18-23

She [Ruth] picked it up and came into the town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gleaned. Then she took out and gave her what was left over after she herself had been satisfied. Her mother-in-law said to her, "Where did you glean today? And where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you." So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, and said, "The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz." Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "Blessed be he by the LORD, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!" Naomi also said to her, "The man is a relative of ours, one of our nearest kin." Then Ruth the Moabite said, "He even said to me, 'Stay close by my servants, until they have finished all my harvest.'" Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, "It is better, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, otherwise you might be bothered in another field." So she stayed close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests; and she lived with her mother-in-law.

John 15: 1-7

"I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinegrower. He removes every branch in Me that bears no fruit. Every branch that bears fruit He prunes to make it bear more fruit. You have already been cleansed by the word that I have spoken to you. Abide in Me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in Me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from Me you can do nothing. Whoever does not abide in Me is thrown away like a branch and withers; such branches are gathered, thrown into the fire, and burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask for whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."