

Sermon: You Raise Me Us (Inspiring) – March 25, 2007
**PASSION: Relationships that are Personal, Active, Special, Secure, Inspiring,
Overwhelming, Near and Always New**

Ruth 3: 1-18

John 15: 8-11

Back in 2000 or early 2001, a young Irishman named Brendan Graham was asked to write lyrics for a melody that Rolf Løvland had written. It was first released in 2001 on the album Once in a Red Moon, by the group Secret Garden. That song, “You Raise Me Up,” was used in a number of commemorations for the September 11, 2001 attacks, although at that time the song had not been formally released in America. Most of us know this song as it is covered by Josh Groban. Here are the lyrics:

When I am down and, oh my soul, so weary; When troubles come and my heart burdened be; Then, I am still and wait here in the silence, Until you come and sit awhile with me.

You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains; You raise me up, to walk on stormy seas; I am strong, when I am on your shoulders; You raise me up... To more than I can be.

There is no life – no life without its hunger; Each restless heart beats so imperfectly; But when you come and I am filled with wonder, Sometimes, I think I glimpse eternity.

You raise me up, so I can stand on mountains; You raise me up, to walk on stormy seas; I am strong, when I am on your shoulders; You raise me up... To more than I can be.

That song is inspiring to many people, because describes a solid relationship, a relationship that is a source of comfort, of support, of hope, of love. It has been used to lead worship. Some worship teams have superimposed images of The Passion of the Christ, Mel Gibson’s movie, over the lyrics. I don’t know if Brendan Graham is a Christian. I don’t know if he intended for others to make those associations; but whenever I hear this song, to me, it’s all about love – God’s love for us, as expressed through Jesus Christ, if we abide in Him.

Jesus is encouraging His disciples to abide in him once again – He already has done this repeatedly in the first part of Chapter 15, and now, in the span of these three verses, three more times he returns to this theme: ***Abide in My love; you will abide in My love, I abide in His [the Father’s] love.*** The disciples are to abide in Jesus’ love. If and when they do that, they will be an inspiration for others. If they abide in Jesus, they will be able to bear much fruit. That fruit shows itself in these works of love that Jesus has taught His disciples to do: to care for others. The greatest must be the servants of all. There is no hierarchy in the branches – all of the branches are valuable, and all are capable of bearing fruit. And when the disciples bear fruit, that fruit is a tangible sign of their discipleship, their being followers of Jesus, the vine in whom they are to abide if they hope to bear any fruit at all. If they do these things, Jesus says, then wonderful, inspirational joy will pour out: Do these things, Jesus said, ***“So that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete”*** – do these things so that the disciples’ joy is able to be as complete as it can possibly be. And what a source of inspiration they were, because joy does inspire people. But for this joy to be as complete as it can be, Jesus’ followers were to be in relationship with one another. It is in relationships that joy gives life. The mark of the faithful community was and is in how it loves one another, and the world.

Sometimes we might hold back, though. That seems to have been at least part of the situation with Ruth and Boaz. Boaz had acted initially to protect Ruth, and indirectly, Naomi, and to provide for them. But now, at the end of the wheat harvest, nothing more has happened. While it’s true that because of Ruth’s hard work and Boaz’ protection, the two women have been able to get to some small sense of a normal life, in truth, they are almost literally living hand to

mouth. They need more help, and Naomi comes up with a plan: at the final, big party at the end of the harvest, Ruth is to approach Boaz, but in a quiet, subtle way.

Ruth does follow Naomi's plan, to a point, but she also adds to it. Instead of waiting to see what Boaz is going to tell her to do when he startles awake, Ruth indirectly proposes marriage. She reminds him of their relationship, and, in effect, asks him to marry her – the image of spreading a cloak over her is a biblical metaphor for entering into a covenantal relationship (see Ezekiel 16:8). At the same time, she also asks him to act as next-of-kin, which will also help to protect Naomi, and allow Elimelech's bloodline to continue. And Boaz immediately agrees. Perhaps what has held him back from becoming more involved with Ruth is the implied age difference between them: Each time they have spoken, Boaz refers to Ruth as "my daughter." It could be a status thing, as when people of higher social standing refer to others with lesser social standing as, "my child," but I personally am inclined to think that there may be a significant age gap between them. After all, the very first thing out of his mouth is that she is showing her loyalty by not chasing after younger men! Perhaps Boaz has been a little leery of what his neighbors might say; after all, he is a man of wealth and prominence, and Ruth is a foreigner. But when pushed to think about it, he remembers that those neighbors also see Ruth as a worthy woman. Maybe, in spite of his wealth, Boaz was a little bit shy, and needed a push. Whatever had held him back, his joy at the prospect of marrying Ruth is almost tangible. Whatever concerns he might have had about making the first move have been relieved, and he indicates his willingness to marry her, and also to act as the redeemer of Elimelech's family. It has been suggested that the gift of the barley was a bride price; it obviously was meaningful to Naomi, who was reassured that things had gone very well indeed. One way or another, their situation was going to improve drastically, and I am certain that both women drew inspiration from that. This action of Boaz' was literally going to raise them up; their lives had been lives of weariness, trouble, literal and figurative hunger, restless and burdened hearts. Now at last they see the prospects of peace, of protection, of calm. What a time of inspiration for them, as well as for Boaz.

We too can take courage, and overcome our fear at making the first move, the fear of rejection, the fear of having our lives upended by new relationships, or the fear of change. We can't do this because WE are so strong. BUT, we can do it because GOD is so strong, and faithful. If we abide in Jesus' love, we can be an inspiration for others, because we will be able to bear much fruit, if we do the works of love that Jesus has been talking about – serving others, putting the needs of others in front of our own needs, giving up our desire for control and pride of place, and becoming servant leaders who are modeled on Jesus' example of being a servant leader. The fruit we bear when we take courage and act in the way that Jesus acted is a tangible sign of our discipleship, our being followers of Jesus, the vine in whom we are to abide if we hope to bear any fruit at all. If we do these things, Jesus says, then wonderful, inspirational joy will pour out: Jesus, through the power of the Holy Spirit, still tells us today to do these things, ***"So that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete."*** Just as the disciples did, we are also called to do these things so that our joy is able to be as complete as it can possibly be. What a source of inspiration we can be, because joy still inspires people, and bears witness as to who our Master is.. But for this joy to be as complete as it can be, as Jesus' followers, we need to be in relationship with one another. In relationships with one another, that joy gives life. The mark of our faithful community is in how WE love one another, and the world. Let us pray.

Precious Name, O how sweet! Hope of earth and joy of heaven; precious Name, O how sweet! Hope of earth and joy of heaven! Strengthen our hearts, minds, souls and strength so that we too can be instruments of Your joy and peace, as we work together for the continued inbreaking of Your kingdom, and the return of Your Son in glory Amen.

Ruth 3: 1-18

Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, I need to seek some security for you, so that it may be well with you. Now here is our kinsman Boaz, with whose young women you have been working. See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. Now wash and anoint yourself, and put on your best clothes and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, observe the place where he lies; then, go and uncover his feet and lie down; and he will tell you what to do." She said to her, "All that you tell me I will do."

So she went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had instructed her. When Boaz had eaten and drunk, and he was in a contented mood, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she came stealthily and uncovered his feet, and lay down. At midnight the man was startled, and turned over, and there, lying at his feet, was a woman! He said, "Who are you?" And she answered, "I am Ruth, your servant; spread your cloak over your servant, for you are next-of-kin." He said, "May you be blessed by the LORD, my daughter; this last instance of your loyalty is better than the first; you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich. And now, my daughter, do not be afraid, I will do for you all that you ask, for all the assembly of my people know that you are a worthy woman. But now, though it is true that I am a near kinsman, there is another kinsman more closely related than I. Remain this night, and in the morning, if he will act as next-of-kin for you, good; let him do it. If he is not willing to act as next-of-kin for you, then, as the LORD lives, I will act as next-of-kin for you. Lie down until the morning."

So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before one person could recognize another; for he said, "It must not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor." Then he said, "Bring the cloak you are wearing and hold it out." So she held it, and he measured out six measures of barley, and put it on her back; then he went into the city. She came to her mother-in-law, who said, "How did things go with you, my daughter?" Then she told her all that the man had done for her, saying, "He gave me these six measures of barley, for he said, 'Do not go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.'" She replied, "Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out, for the man will not rest, but will settle the matter today."

John 15: 8-11

Jesus said, "My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit and become My disciples. As the Father has loved Me, so I have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. I have said these things to you so that My joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete."