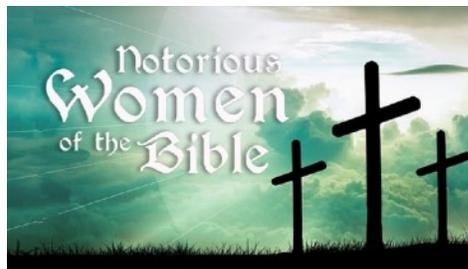


Centre Congregational Church, United Church of Christ
The Reverend Dr Scott Everett Couper
April 25, 2021
Fourth Sunday after Easter

"Ruth: The Embracer of a New Heritage"

Third of six in a series entitled "Happy Easter (Thanks to Women)!"

Ruth 2:8-12



Peter Abell did that which a conscientious Christian ought.



He wrote to Vermont's Senator Patrick Leahy and encouraged him to advocate for action that would allow immigrants who hold Temporary Protective Status (TPS) to remain in the United States. I encourage all of you to read more extensively about this important issue. You can begin by reading Peter's correspondence to Senator Leahy in the next May issue of *Centre Bells*.



For now, allow me to share with you that for thirty years, TPS has “allowed some immigrants to reside in the United States while their home countries are in crisis. Less than a year after President Donald Trump took office, his administration began to dismantle the program. Over the course of eight months in 2017 and 2018, the Department of Homeland Security ordered the departure of 98 percent of TPS recipients. Unless Congress passes legislation that grants TPS holders permanent status or unless President Biden’s administration issues new TPS designations [...], the forced removal of 402,000 TPS holders could begin as soon as October.

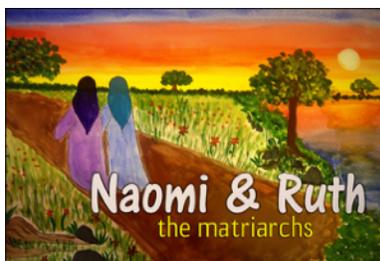


Because they are the parents of some 273,000 U.S. citizens — most of them under the age of 21 — it could also turn into the largest family-separation operation in American history”.¹

Before anyone gets worried that I am being partisan by mentioning Donald Trump or Joe Biden’s name, let me assure you that this sermon is about Ruth. And Ruth is in the Bible. Therefore, in speaking about the TPS program, like Peter, I am speaking *biblically*.

What does Ruth have to do with the impending deportation of over 400,000 TPS holders? Well, many. Almost too many to count. But, allow me to name just three.

Naomi, as Israelite, lived with her husband in the foreign land of Moab. Their two sons married two local, that is, Moabite, women. Moabites were often despised by the Israelites. The story goes that Naomi’s husband died and then so did her two sons. All three widows were left destitute.



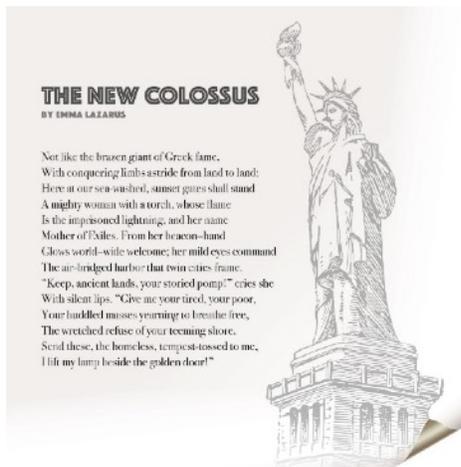
¹ Marcela Valdes, “There Lawsuit Prevent 400,000 Deportations. Now It’s Biden’s Call”, *The New York Times Magazine*, April 7, 2021. Found at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/04/07/magazine/immigration-el-salvador.html>, accessed May 4, 2021.

Ruth, the Moabite daughter-in-law, decided to accompany Naomi back to her homeland to Bethlehem in Judah. By choosing to accompany Naomi back to her homeland, Ruth became a foreign refugee in Judah. This decision of loyalty to Naomi ensured that Ruth would be at the bottom of the socio-economic totem pole: a woman, a widow, landless, poor, hungry, destitute without blood kin, and a foreigner. Her fate in Moab would be bleak; yet her fate in Judah was likely to have been even bleaker. So, the first similarity that Ruth has in common with over 400,000 TPS holders is that Ruth struggled to make a living as an immigrant in a foreign land.

Where you go
I'll go,
Where you stay
I'll stay.
Ruth 1:16

The second commonality between Ruth and TPS holders is that both seek to belong, to participate, to establish relationships, to raise a family, to build a home, and to work to earn a living. Ruth said to Naomi, “Where you go, I will go, and where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.¹⁷ Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried” (Ruth 1:16). And by so doing, Ruth and TPS holders seek to graft themselves to the land they adopt.

Our country used to welcome immigrants.

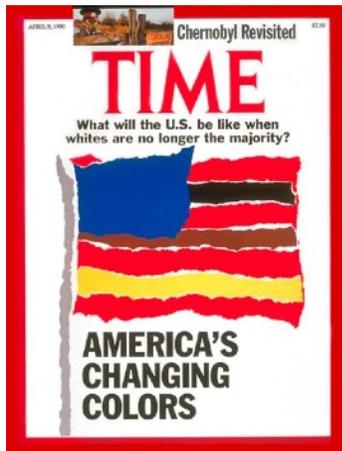


The poem “The New Colossus” inscribed on the Statue of Liberty proclaims, “Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!”² I am unsure why today we keep open the Statue of Liberty or why this poem is not already covered-up given the restrictions placed on immigrant for the last four years.

For good or for bad, we are an immigrant nation. For bad, because White Europeans colonized North America and committed ‘genocide’ (yes, I use the term intentionally) on a breathtaking scale to steal it from indigenous peoples. For good, because we are a nation sourced from many lands and this makes our

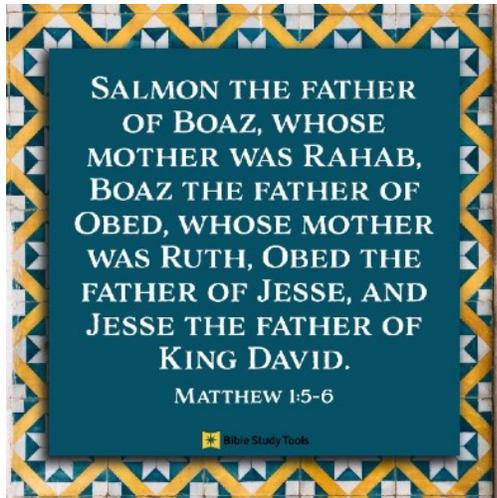
² Walt Hunter, “The Story Behind the Poem on the Statue of Liberty”, *The Atlantic*, January 16, 2018. Found at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2018/01/the-story-behind-the-poem-on-the-statue-of-liberty/550553/>, accessed April 24, 2021.

population beautifully diverse in culture, ethnicity, and language. The difference between 1883, when “The New Colossus” was written, and today is that today the immigrants are ‘browning’ America.



The motivation behind The Wall, ‘Make America Great Again’, and the anti-Islam immigration bill is in part about trying to halt the ‘browning’ of America. That is ultimately what ‘nativism’ is about in the USA; it is opposed to the ‘browning’ of the nation. As a person of faith, I am not concerned at all over the browning of this country, despite my pasty whiteness. In fact, I welcome this browning.

The third and last commonality between Ruth and TPS holders is one that was realized long after Ruth died and it will be realized in this country long after you and I die.



The progeny of Ruth built a kingdom and the progeny of brown people in the USA will make America great (as they always have).

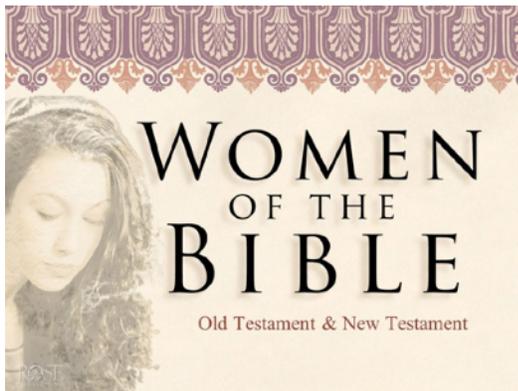


SCRIPTURE HEROINES.
RUTH.
"Stick close to mother-in-law; let both eyes watch."—Ruth 1:16
"Some men follow the happy influence guide
In light and shadow; Ruth, the cheekbone,
Edith,
190. 191.
It "durst for a while," and sorrow's day,
250

Ruth, the Moab immigrant in Judah, married Boaz. The two had a son, Obed. Obed 'begat' Jesse. And Jesse was the father of King David. Ruth, the

foreigner immigrant was King David's great-grandmother. And more than that, if we read ahead in the Christian scriptures, Ruth is a seventeenth generational ancestor of Jesus (Matthew 1). Ruth, a foreign immigrant, a Moabite, is a direct ancestor of Jesus the Christ.

For this reason, our sermon today is entitled "Ruth: The Embracer of a New Heritage".³ She was a poor, destitute, landless, pagan, foreigner who through dedicated faithfulness to her mother-in-law, Naomi, and hard work gleaning in Boaz's fields became an ancestor to King David and of Jesus!



A fundamental emphasis of the Bible, from the Hebrew scriptures to the Christian scriptures, is that faithfulness, dedication, and God's favor are not at all associated with race, color, or nationality. In fact, the divine injunctions to protect the 'so-called' alien litter the Hebrew scriptures. And the Christian scriptures

³ "Ruth: The Embracer of a New Heritage", in "The Women of the Bible", *Life Magazine*, editorial director, Kostya Kennedy, 2019, 48.

relate that those who accepted Jesus as the Christ were Jews and Gentiles alike. In fact, the Gentiles, the foreigners, the supposed 'un-Chosen' people, are more often than not emphasized in the Christian scriptures as having 'ears to hear' the gospel of Jesus Christ: the Roman soldier, the Samaritan woman at the well, the Syrophenician women, the Ethiopian prince - we can go and on.



Ruth is a significant character in our scriptures whose story reminds us that without women our faith would be desiccated and dead. Her story also reminds us that without foreigners, without so-called 'aliens', without diversity, without the fresh water of immigration, our nation can become a stagnant cesspool. Without Eve, there would be no humanity. Without Miriam, there would have been no liberation. Without Ruth, there would have been no King David and no Jesus. Wow. That's a big deal.



Ruth: The Embracer of a New Heritage. Respect her.

This was the Word of God. And it was delivered to the People of God. And the people of God responded, "Amen!"