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Ruth 1:1-19

At the Movies: Hunger Games

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Ruth 1:1-19 The Message

Once upon a time—it was back in the days when judges led Israel— there was a famine in the land. A man from Bethlehem in Judah left home to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. The man’s name was Elimelech; his wife’s name was Naomi; his sons were named Mahlon and Kilion—all Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They all went to the country of Moab and settled there. Elimelech died and Naomi was left, she and her two sons. The sons took Moabite wives; the name of the first was Orpah, the second Ruth. They lived there in Moab for the next ten years. But then the two brothers, Mahlon and Kilion, died. Now the woman was left without either her young men or her husband. One day she got herself together, she and her two daughters-in-law, to leave the country of Moab and set out for home; she had heard that God had been pleased to visit his people and give them food. And so she started out from the place she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law with her, on the road back to the land of Judah. After a short while on the road, Naomi told her two daughters-in-law, “Go back. Go home and live with your mothers. And may God treat you as graciously as you treated your deceased husbands and me. May God give each of you a new home and a new husband!” She kissed them and they cried openly. They said, “No, we’re going on with you to your people.” But Naomi was firm: “Go back, my dear daughters. Why would you come with me? Do you suppose I still have sons in my womb who can become your future husbands? Go back, dear daughters—on your way, please! I’m too old to get a husband. Why, even if I said, ‘There’s still hope!’ and this very night got a man and had sons, can you imagine being satisfied to wait until they were grown? Would you wait that long to get married again? No, dear daughters; this is a bitter pill for me to swallow—more bitter for me than for you. God has dealt me a hard blow.” Again they cried openly. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye; but Ruth embraced her and held on. Naomi said, “Look, your sister-in-law is going back home to live with her own people and gods; go with her.” But Ruth said, “Don’t force me to leave you; don’t make me go home. Where you go, I go; and where you live, I’ll live. Your people are my people, your God is my god; where you die, I’ll die, and that’s where I’ll be buried, so help me God—not even death itself is going to come between us!” When Naomi saw that Ruth had her heart set on going with her, she gave in. And so the two of them traveled on together to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem the whole town was soon buzzing: “Is this really our Naomi? And after all this time!”

Hunger Games is set in Panem which is the Latin word for bread. It is a totalitarian society in post-apocalyptic North America. The Capitol has all the power and controls the 12 Districts surrounding the Capitol. 100 years before there was a rebellion and ever since each of the 12 Districts send 2 tributes, 1 boy and 1 girl between the ages of 12 and 18. The tributes are chosen by a lottery to compete in the annual Hunger Games. The Hunger Games are on TV and everyone watches as the tributes fight to the death until there is 1 winner. Different people in the film say, “May the odds be ever in your favor,” and the odds are 24 to 1 that you will be killed. Hunger Games uses the violence in the movie to show you how awful violence is. And Hunger Games exposes our own entertainment culture as a diversion from the injustices in our world today.[[1]](#footnote-2)

Katniss is our heroine and when her 12 year old baby sister is selected as a tribute in the lottery to compete in the Hunger Games, Katniss volunteers to take her place. Hunger Games is a movie about hope because a few will inspire hope for the many. Katniss and her choices in the Hunger Games inspire a revolution in the 12 Districts. Near the end of the movie, President Snow warns the game master, “Hope, it is the only thing stronger than fear. A little hope is effective, a lot of hope is dangerous.” Hope is what we Christians are all about!

Have you ever heard about Eugene Land?[[2]](#footnote-3) He was a self-made millionaire who spoke to a class of 59 sixth-graders in East Harlem in 1981. Before he spoke, he asked the principal of the school how many of those kids were expected to go to college and the principal said, “maybe one.” The statistics for that neighborhood were that half of all students would not finish high school. Eugene Land wanted to inspire the kids, so he promised them that day if they would stay in school, he would pay their college tuition for each and every one of them. The kids later said, they now had hope. One of the students said, “I had something to look forward to, something waiting for me. It was a golden feeling." Nearly 90% of that class went on to graduate from high school. Eugene Land hired John Rivera to work with the kids to encourage them. One of the students said John showed him how to take all his negatives and turn them into positives.

“Hope, it is the only thing stronger than fear. A little hope is effective, a lot of hope is dangerous.” In our Scripture for today we have another story about hope. We have the story of Ruth and Naomi, a young woman and her mother-in-law. Ruth and Naomi both experienced grief in the loss of their husbands. They had experienced hunger and famine. After all this tragedy, Naomi expected Ruth to go back to her homeland, to her people. But Ruth, embraced Naomi and held on. Ruth says to Naomi, “Where you go, I go; and where you live, I’ll live. Your people are my people, your God is my god; where you die, I’ll die, and that’s where I’ll be buried, so help me God—not even death itself is going to come between us!”

Ruth like Katniss chooses her family and finds hope and peace with her choice. It is like the vows that you make at a wedding, “For better, for worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health.” Loving one another is a commitment. As that chapter in 1 Corinthians 13 ends, “and now faith, hope and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these if love.” (1 Corinthians 13:13 NRSV). We love, because God in Christ Jesus loves us. We have hope because of God in Christ Jesus.

Katniss and Ruth could have made different choices. But they chose community; they chose family. Katniss knew that her sister needed her and Ruth knew that Naomi needed her. It is hard to make that choice because sometimes we would rather chose ourselves, we would rather only worry about our problems, only worry about our children, only worry about our neighborhood schools, only worry about our city, only worry about our country. But when we expand our world and open our heart, hope begins. When we open our hearts to try and do something about gun violence in America, when we speak up against racism and bigotry, hope begins.

In the next weeks you are going to be hearing about a new program called One Plus One that the North Texas Conference of the United Methodist Church is spearheading. It is about serving children, changing lives and transforming communities. The goal is to get 5,000 of the United Methodists in North Texas to mentor and tutor in one-on-one relationships with students in public schools. In the late 18th century, Methodists began teaching children who worked in factories, mines and on farms how to read. That was the forerunner of the Sunday School movement and began the Methodist Church’s long-standing history impacting education. In North Texas there are 300 Methodist churches in 21 counties that are pledging to engage with public schools and to make an impact in one-on-one relationships with children through reading, tutoring or mentoring.

The school system in a large city had a program to help children keep up with their school work during stays in the city's hospitals. One day a teacher who was assigned to the program received a call asking her to visit a particular child. She took the child's name and room number and talked briefly with the child's regular class teacher. "We're studying nouns and adverbs in his class now," the regular teacher said, "and I'd be grateful if you could help him understand them so he doesn't fall too far behind."  The hospital program teacher went to see the boy that afternoon. No one had mentioned to her that the boy had been badly burned and was in great pain. Upset at the sight of the boy, she stammered as she told him, "I've been sent by your school to help you with nouns and adverbs." When she left she felt she hadn't accomplished much.

But the next day, a nurse asked her, "What did you do to that boy?" The teacher felt she must have done something wrong and began to apologize. "No, no," said the nurse. "You don't know what I mean. We've been worried about that little boy, but ever since yesterday, his whole attitude has changed. He's fighting back, responding to treatment. It's as though he's decided to live."  Two weeks later the boy explained that he had completely given up hope until the teacher arrived. Everything changed when he came to a simple realization. He said, "They wouldn't send a teacher to work on nouns and adverbs with a dying boy, would they?"[[3]](#footnote-4)

In the Hunger Games President Snow says, “Hope, it is the only thing stronger than fear. A little hope is effective, a lot of hope is dangerous.” With a lot of hope, things change radically. Kids in inner city schools go to college, boys with terrible burns recover, things do not stay the same! To those in charge, a lot of hope is dangerous because you never know what will happen. Things are out of control and therefore dangerous. What can we do to take a situation and by providing lots of hope, change it radically? Are you in? Or do you want things to stay the same?

1. Dick Staub. “Why we’re hungry for ‘The Hunger Games’”. http://www.kfumc.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/CurrentEchoes\_KFUMC1.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. http://articles.latimes.com/1990-03-25/news/mn-244\_1\_high-school-counseling [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. http://www.sermonillustrations.com/a-z/h/hope.htm [↑](#footnote-ref-4)