

Ruth 1:1-17
I Pledge to Thee
WRCoB 10.20.19

A family drove home after church.

While they were driving
The father complained about everything.

The music was difficult to sing.
The sermon was too long.
The announcements were unclear.

The building was hot.
The people were unfriendly.

He went on and on, complaining about virtually everything.

Finally, his son said

*Dad, you have to admit it wasn't too bad a show
For the dollar you put in the plate!*

~~

Today is Pledge Sunday.

We pledge our financial support
To our church for next year.

The fact is without the support we would cease to exist.

What goes into these plates from Sunday-to-Sunday
Is the fuel for our engines . . .

As we strive to minister to the needs of our members
And the greater community beyond these walls.

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Both the pledge and the financial support are important.

What I mean is

Without your financial support
The doors of the church would close.

We need to know what you plan to give
So that we can accurately create a working budget.

So WE need your pledge.

But YOU need your pledge, too!

For you see, a pledge is a promise
To respond in faith to what God has done
In Christ's love and saving grace.

It is a step in faith.

In that sense, it is as important to pledge our support
As it is to give our support.

Zherina constantly tries to get me to promise
I'd do something.

Because she knows when I promise her I'd do it, I'll do it.

So, too, is our pledge to the church
It is a sacred promise.

An example of this

Is Ruth's pledge to her mother-in-law, Naomi.

Ruth 1:16-17 (NLT)

16 But Ruth replied, "Don't ask me to leave you and turn back. Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God. 17 Wherever you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord punish me severely if I allow anything but death to separate us!"

Ruth's vow is a pledge of allegiance

A promise of commitment

A declaration of dedication.

Her word was her bond.

And there are times in each of our own lives,

When we need to declare our loyalties

And pledge what truly is important in life!

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The Book of Ruth is a wonderful story on many levels.

First, it is a story of the ancestry of King David.

Ruth, who was not a Jew but a Moabite

Was David's great-grandmother!

In an age when the purity of blood lines were so important

Along comes the greatest king ever to lead Israel

Who, himself was 1/8th Moabite.

Secondly, the story of Ruth puts a face to a foreigner.

It gives us insight into the plight so common
To people who flee untenable circumstances.

As in the mass exodus currently unfolding in N. Syria.

As is happening in Africa and Central America.

They are people, too, created in the image of God
That deserves our concern and care.

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Thirdly, it is a story of God's providence.

That unbeknownst to Ruth or Naomi
They were small but incredibly, vital players
In the unfolding drama of God!

Little did either of them know
What impact they'd have
On the future of the kingdom of Israel.

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And lastly, the Book of Ruth
Is a wonderfully positive story on love and loyalty.

It is a story of Ruth's unswerving pledge
To Naomi, her mother-in-law

And her decision to remain with her
Through the thick and thin of life
No matter what may come.

Take a few minutes this week and read the Book of Ruth.

It is a delightful short story,
Guaranteed to lift hearts and souls!

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I want to talk a little about loyalty.

Some say loyalty is a forgotten virtue.

Maybe! Maybe not!

In many ways, loyalty is alive and well!

I mean, look at the loyalty of those National fans!

They're finally in the World Series.

They are finally enjoying the fruits of their loyalty.

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Sports fans are very loyal!

For example, there was this Redskins fan
Who had a bad seat at the FedEx Stadium.

Looking down with his binoculars
He spotted an empty seat on the 50-yard line.

Thinking to himself, "what a waste"
He made his way down to the empty seat.

When he arrived at the seat
He asked the man sitting next to it if the seat was taken.

The man slowly replied, *It was my wife's seat.*
She passed away.
She was a big Redskins fan.

The first man replied
Gosh, I'm so sorry to hear.

But tell me, why didn't you give the ticket
To a friend or relative?

To which he replied, "They're all at her funeral."

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Actually I see loyalty all over the place!

I see loyalty in our hobbies, our TV shows
Our favorite foods, our car manufacturers
And loyalty to our political parties!

However, when it comes to loyalty to family
Loyalty to friends
Loyalty to the workplace
And loyalty to God and church

Then, yes, one has to wonder if loyalty is a forgotten virtue!

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Speaking of loyalty, did you know

"Americans are more loyal to their toothpaste and toilet
paper than to their religious affiliations?"

Seriously, there are "more choosy"
About Charmin or Colgate than they are about church?"

According to Ron Seller, president of Elliot Research

16% of Protestants say they would consider only one denomination, while 22% of them would use only one brand of toothpaste and 19% would use just one brand of bathroom tissue.

Ok, so we're not talking major differences
But you get my point.

We are less loyal to our church
Than we are to our toilet paper!

~~

There are times in our lives
When we need to pledge our loyalties.

Judith, when she became a US citizen
Pledged her allegiance to the United States.

It was quite a special occasion
To see Judith raise her right hand
Along with people from 46 other nationalities
And recite the oath of allegiance.

Students memorize the Pledge of Allegiance

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

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Yesterday, I officiated Shawn and Monica's wedding.

They gave marriage vows to one another.

I take thee to be my wedded spouse, to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death do us part, according to God's holy ordinance; and thereto I pledge thee myself to you.

I believe in the vows parents and the church make
When dedicating children.

We pledge to support and love this child by providing the opportunity to grow up in a family of faith, with the hope that someday they would confess Christ as Lord and Savior.

Above all, I believe in the pledge of loyalty
One makes to God and the church
In the vows of baptism!

In the Church of the Brethren, there are three.

I repent of my sins and confess and accept Jesus as my Lord and Savior.

I promise to live in the keeping with the teachings and spirit of the New Testament.

I promise to be a faithful member of this church, upholding it by my prayers, and my presence, my substance and my service.

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I believe there are things in life
Important enough to pledge our loyalty.

I believe God in Jesus Christ . . .

I believe West Richmond Church of the Brethren . . .

I believe you, my brothers and sisters . . .

Are important enough to give my pledge to.

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As part of our vows of commitment this Pledge Sunday
I invite you to share with me the Covenant Pledge
Found in your bulletin.

Covenant Pledge

Having been led by the Holy Spirit to receive Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior, and on the profession of our faith in Him, having been baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

We do now in the presence of God must solemnly and joyfully enter into covenant with one another as one Body in Christ. We promise that we will watch over and counsel one another in the spirit of brotherly love, that we will remember one another in our prayers, and that we will aid each other in sickness and distress.

We further agree, by the aid of the Holy Spirit, to strive for the upbuilding of this church through knowledge, holiness and witness

To promote its spiritual and physical well being; to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline and doctrines; and to contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church,

the relief of the poor, and the spread of the Gospel through all nations.

We further covenant to maintain family and private devotions

To educate our children in the knowledge and discipline of the Lord; to seek the salvation of our family and acquaintances;

To live wisely in this present world;

To do justice in our dealings, to honor our commitments, and to live as Christ-like examples to the world; to avoid all gossip and slander, but rather to live as peacemakers; to abstain from everything that will cause our brother to stumble or that will bring reproach upon the cause of Christ;

To strive to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior,

That in criticism or praise we will humbly and earnestly seek to live to the honor and glory of Him who loved us and gave Himself for us.