

Ruth 1:1-17
I Pledge Myself To Thee
WRCoB 10.15.23

It was a special day for us

When Judith became a US citizen

In the Federal Courthouse in Cedar Rapids, IA.

The day included a swearing-in ceremony.

All candidates were asked to give an oath of allegiance

Each candidate was asked to swear this.

I hereby declare, on oath, that I absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state, or sovereignty, of whom or which I have heretofore been a subject or citizen;

that I will support and defend the Constitution and laws of the United States of America against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I will bear arms on behalf of the United States when required by the law;

that I will perform noncombatant service in the Armed Forces of the United States when required by the law; that I will perform work of national importance under civilian direction when required by the law; and that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; so help me God.

In our Scripture Lesson today
Ruth pledges an oath of allegiance
To her mother-in-law, Naomi.

**Ruth 1:16b-17 CEB Wherever you go, I will go; and
wherever you stay, I will stay. 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 do this to me and more so if even death
separates me from you.”**

Ruth's vow is a pledge of allegiance
A promise of commitment, a declaration of dedication.

Call it what you will
There comes a time in each of our lives
When we should declare our loyalties!

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

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

For Ruth was David's great-grandmother!

Secondly, during the time of Ezra and Nehemiah
When the Book of Ruth was written
Racial purity was greatly stressed

The Book of Ruth reveals that the King David
Had Moabite ancestry

Putting into question the push toward racial purity.

Thirdly, the Book of Ruth is a story of God's providence.

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

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

It is a short read.

Take some time to read this heartwarming story.

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What I want to talk about today is loyalty.

Loyalty is still around today.

For instance, sports fans are extremely loyal!

There was this Commanders fan
Who had a really bad seat in FedEx field.

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

He thought to himself, "what a waste".

He decided to worked his way down to the empty seat.

When he arrived at the seat
He asked the man sitting next to it
"Is this seat taken?"

The man replied, "This is my wife's seat."

"She's passed away. She was a big Redskins fan."

The first man replied, "Wow! I'm sorry to hear."

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

The man replied, "Why? Because they're all at her funeral."

Now, that's loyalty!

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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!

I see lots of loyalty!

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

Well, I have some concerns.

Ruth is a pleasant reminder the virtue of loyalty!

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To give a little background to our passage

Though it was written during the return from exile
During the time of Ezra and Nehemiah

The Book of Ruth took place during the time of the Judges
Somewhere between the years 1200 to 1000 BC.
The time between Moses and King David.

It was a dark period in the history of Israel.

**Judges 21:25 NIV In those days Israel had no king;
everyone did as they saw fit.**

Due to a severe famine
Naomi, her husband, and their two sons
Leave Israel for the desert country of Moab.

The Moabites and the Israelites were hostile to one another
Not unlike the Palestinian/Israeli conflict today.

Consequently, the family lived
As oppressed foreigners in Moab.

While in Moab, Naomi's husband, Elimelech, dies
Leaving Naomi and her two sons.

The sons marry Moabite women, Orpah and Ruth.

And all is well for ten years, until tragedy strikes again.

One after the other, both Naomi's sons die
Leaving no children.

Naomi, Orpah, and Ruth are widowed
And left to fend for themselves.

And in that society and at that time
Widows did not have an easy time of it.

Hearing that the famine ended in Israel
Naomi decides to return to Bethlehem.

Naomi accompanied by her daughters-in-law
Travel to the border between Moab and Israel.

There they stop to say their good-byes

Naomi tells her daughters-in-law
To their return to their home.

There, they have a chance for a new life
An easier time finding husbands.

But they argue with Naomi.
Both determined to go with her.

But Naomi is insistent that they must return home..

Orpah obeys and returns home.

But Ruth disobeys Naomi's orders
And pledges her devotion to Naomi.

She willingly forsakes all things dear
Home, culture, language, family, and faith

And instead pledges her loyalty to her mother-in-law, Naomi!

Her loyal oath stands as one of the strongest commitments
Between two people ever recorded in the Bible.

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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

To say it another way

They are more willing to change churches
Than they are their toilet paper or toothpaste!

Loyalty . . . what are we loyal to?

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We pledge our loyalties to many things

The Pledge of Allegiance

Is an important part of living in the USA.

Most of us grew up pledging allegiance

Every morning in our classrooms.

Standing up, facing the flag

With our hand upon our heart.

*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.*

I believe in the importance of the vows of commitment
 Made between the bride and groom;

I take thee to be my wedded wife/husband, 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 my faith.

I believe in the unspoken but critical vows of loyalty
 As parents to our children
 And as children to our parents.

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And above all, I believe in the oath of loyalty
 We make to God and the church
 In our vows of baptism!

In the Church of the Brethren, there are as read:

I believe that Jesus Christ is God's Son and receive Him and trust Him as my Savior.

I will turn away from all sin and will endeavor by God's grace to live according to the example and teachings of Jesus.

I will be loyal to the church, upholding her by my prayers, my presence, my substance, and my service.

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

What vows of loyalty have you pledged?

How loyal have you been to them?

Besides our loyalties to our sports teams
Toilet paper and toothpaste

How do we measure up in our loyalty to God,
To Christ Jesus, and to West Richmond?

Have we been faithful to our vows?

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This is what I see week in and week out.

I see a small group of committed and loyal believers
Fulfilling their baptismal pledges.

I see people who spend hours
Serving God and neighbor
At WRCOB and in our community.

I see your steadfastness!

And it does my heart good,
To witness your loyalty and commitment!

Loyalty may be a forgotten virtue in our society today
But it is alive and well here

And I give thanks for your dedication!

And so, as we seek to honor our pledges in life

From our civic duties
To our domestic responsibilities

From our commitments at work
To our vows to Jesus Christ

May we see the importance of our vows of allegiance
That we make before God and humankind.

This month we consider our pledges of loyalty
To West Richmond
Our tithes, talents, and time.

And whether you are a member or not
We are glad you are.

As I pledge my loyalty to West Richmond and to you
Might you consider the same?

Ruth pledged her loyalty to Naomi

And God gave her the strength and insight
To fulfill her pledges

May God give us the strength to fulfill our pledges
For God's glory and our neighbors good. Amen.