

“‘Til Death Do Us Part”

Ruth 1:1-19a

These words of Ruth have been a very popular wedding text throughout the history of the Church. Even though the conversation takes place between a mother-in-law and a daughter-in-law, the reason that it has been used for weddings is because of the total devotion that Ruth has for Naomi. When we get married, we promise to remain with each other “for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer, in sickness and in health.” This is our vow before God. We are to spend time contemplating the seriousness of these words. This is not like downloading the app for Doodle Jump on your iPhone and agreeing to the terms and conditions. However, quite often, the same amount of time is devoted to this vow as to “reading the terms and conditions.”

How often is the vow made with a wink and a nod knowing that it will last as long as life remains better, richer, and healthier? But Ruth had no such hope. She knew that things were going to be bad. They were going to a strange land, and Naomi and Ruth were a couple of widows with no means of supporting themselves. There was no Social Security or government agency where they could get food or shelter. They would have no immediate family in Israel. There was no reason to believe that anyone was going to help them.

In the ancient world, the only ways that a widow could make a living, if

she had no family, was either to beg or to rent her home as a hotel for travelers, with the understanding that you would share your bed with the traveler. Needless to say, Naomi's future seemed to hold nothing but sorrow and desolation. There was no reasonable prospect that life would get better, but Ruth remained committed to her relationship with Naomi.

Things being bad, Ruth could have gone back to her father's home, and he would have taken care of her until another husband was found for her, but her commitment, her loyalty was complete.

This unconditional love that Ruth had for Naomi is the reason that this text has been used at weddings. Unconditional love that a husband and a wife are to share is the belief that "the other person's needs are more important than my needs." Complete commitment. Complete loyalty.

When we walk down that aisle and say, "for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer... 'til death do us part," that is a statement professing real love. However, we look out into the world around us and see that one half of all marriages end before death parts them. What happens to that unconditional love?

Why does this occur? And when does it occur to a person that their spouse's needs are no longer a higher priority than their own?

When and why does that loyalty end? Ruth is one of the great examples in the Bible of loyalty. But what is loyalty? Martin Luther gives us a tremendous definition of loyalty in his Small Catechism. In his explanation of the 8th Commandment, Luther writes: "We should fear and love God so that we do not tell lies about our neighbor, betray him, slander him, or hurt his reputation, but defend him, speak well of him, and explain

everything in the kindest way.”

Loyalty in a marriage is not just broken when one spouse has an affair or walks out. Loyalty is broken when we talk behind our spouse’s back, or when we hear another person talking behind our spouse’s back and we do not defend them.

Whether it is gossip, or lustful desires, or money problems at home, or whatever the things are that trouble our marriages, know that these are all things that Satan has brought into the world to tear apart what God has joined together.

It makes Satan angry if even one apple grows on a tree, or if even one of your fingers is healthy. It certainly vexes him that even one couple has a happy, loving marriage. If it were not for God’s protection in this sinful world, Satan would surely tear all of us to shreds.

Naomi and Ruth knew that there would be hardship and difficulty down the road. They assumed that they would have to survive by begging, yet they put their trust in the Lord. There was no guarantee that life was going to get better for them. Putting your trust in the Lord does not mean that now everything is going to come up roses. The Gospel of Prosperity peddled on TV and in books is not real. Faithful Christians often endure hardship, heartbreak, and thorns in the flesh that are never taken away. This message will not make me an Internet sensation. But this truth is the reason that we need the real Gospel; the real body and blood of Jesus broken and shed for you.

As we continue to struggle with the life that we have here on earth, and we live our lives, all of us, having relationships with other people. No

matter who it is in our lives with whom we have a relationship, one thing is constant: The person with whom we have our relationship is a sinful human being who has no chance of being perfect, they are going to make mistakes, and they are in need of patience and forgiveness, just like you need patience and forgiveness; just like I need patience and forgiveness.

Forgiveness is such an important part of our lives – to be reconciled with each other. The word “reconciled” literally means “to walk together again.” When there is no forgiveness, no reconciliation, we walk apart.

Forgiveness is not only the most important aspect of our relationship with God, but with all of us as sinful people dealing with other sinful people, forgiveness and patience are the only ways that we can remain walking together.

Satan does everything in his power so that our lives together are not easy. But our merciful, loving, forgiving Father in heaven has promised us the strength to endure this sinful world. Whatever sin is interfering with the relationships in your life, Christ has paid for that sin.

Remember to be patient. Remember to forgive one another as God has forgiven you. This is a big part of what it means to be “in Christ.” And “for better or for worse,” walk together with those people that you love. Like Ruth was for Naomi, God has placed them in your life to be a blessing for you in this sinful world. Amen.