

### “Et Misertus Expansum”

- Over the last few weeks, Gaius and I have been watching the Harry Potter movies through again
  - We are currently on movie 3- I confess I am a potterhead
  - I read the books through twice, and own the DVDS
  - I stopped just short of buying some Slytheran socks I saw in the mall the other day
  - And did you hear that they are making a new trilogy of films? “Magical Beasts and where to find them”
  - I am reminded of a sermon not too long ago in which Amber, referencing Harry Potter said
  - There might be people sitting right next to you who find Harry Potter a modern retelling of the of the gospel story
  - Truth is, she might have been talking about me...
  - For today’s sermon, one example... how Harry handles the idea of mudbloods.
  - If you are not familiar with these books and movies, it is believed by some of the evil wizards that depending on your heritage
  - Some wizards are better than others. And if your parents are non-magical, or muggles, you are referred to as a Mudblood, or dirty blood
  - Unpure, outside the clan, contaminating the wizarding world with your inferior self.
  - Of course Harry rejects such distinctions
  - Indeed, Lord Voldemort (silent “T”) was only defeated thanks to the help of many good wizards who were not pure bloods
  - This is only one small way in which the Gospel is retold in these books
  - And the thing is, this idea of mud bloods is totally believable
  - That some wizards would look down on others because of who their parents are, or where they are from
  - It’s believable because it has happened in our history and indeed happens today

- And if one thing is true, I believe that God is always there working behind the scenes to undo just such examples of sinful division
- So to celebrate the new Harry Potter movie, and all the gospel “good news” that will hopefully be there
- And to help preach today’s lessons from Year B Proper 27
- I have created my own little spell using the Google Latin Translator - “Et Misertus Expansum”, or “let compassion spread”<sup>1</sup>
- Hang in there- I’m going some where with this...
  - The connection here from Harry Potter to our reading from the book of Ruth is an easy step
  - Indeed, it was reading about Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz that made me think of mud bloods, and many of the other ways in which we draw lines of exclusion
  - This reading unfolds during the time of Ezra, the high priest, who preached ethnical purity<sup>2</sup>
  - He wanted Israel to remain separate, pure, and unstained by the unbelief that surrounded them in order to avoid God’s wrath
  - He went so far as to require some to require some of the men who were married to wives of other countries to leave their wife and children
  - They were not good enough. They were not pure bloods.
  - And that included Ruth, who was a Moabite, and a widow of an Israelite.
  - Yet she had promised even after her husband died to stay with her mother-in-law, Naomi
  - A widow from a foreign country traveling with her mother-in-law who was also a widow- life in the ancient world was hard
  - I believe before we can go any further we must stop and acknowledge this fact
  - The ancient world was very patriarchal, and the closet kin of the man who had died had the right to the estate and the wife of his kin
  - A terrible arrangement for the widows, no question, perhaps only a tiny bit better than being turned out on the streets without a family at all
  - When we are reading a story like Ruth in the Bible, Terry Tempest Williams says that we have to read the Bible “from below”

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<sup>1</sup> <https://translate.google.com/?ie=UTF-8&hl=en&client=tw-ob#auto/la/let%20compassion%20spread>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.umcdiscipleship.org/worship/lectionary-calendar/twenty-fourth-sunday-after-pentecost-year-B>

- While Ruth and Naomi find themselves in a culture and society that is stacked against them
- It is ultimately their loyalty and compassion to one another that gives birth to their power over their own lives<sup>3</sup>
- It is what enables God to work through them for not only their own sakes, but for a much larger purpose
- At Naomi's prompting, Ruth approaches Boaz, a relative of her husband's, on the threshing floor during the middle of the night
- It was certainly an unusual way to approach to courtship, also not exactly rated G
- But it works, and Boaz later that morning requests permission to take Ruth as his wife since his kin has died, even though it was not required of him
- There is no doubt that God was in this particular piece of history unfolding, using Ruth's loyalty and compassion for her mother-in-law
- For it was Ruth and Boaz who had a son named Obed, who was the grandfather of David, and the ancestor of Jesus<sup>4</sup>
- What was it that convinced Boaz to marry Ruth even in the xenophobic climate of his day?
  - Ruth asks him, in chapter 2 of the book, and Boaz tells her
  - Boaz explains that he had heard all about her compassion, steadfastness, and kindness to her mother-in-law
  - And it inspired him to do something good himself- her fidelity inspired him before they met on the threshing room floor that evening.<sup>5</sup>
  - I think we too often underestimate the power found in compassion, faithfulness, and generosity
  - Too often is is the voice of hate, fear, and anxiety that seems to win the day
  - But here in Ruth, God uses a different way to accomplish God's purpose, one in which an act of compassion is what changes the world
  - So let the compassion spread.

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<sup>3</sup> Terry Tempest Williams, "*When Women Were Birds*", quoted by Kathryn Matthews at [http://www.ucc.org/worship\\_samuel\\_sermon\\_seeds\\_november\\_8\\_2015](http://www.ucc.org/worship_samuel_sermon_seeds_november_8_2015)

<sup>4</sup> Walter Brueggemann, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: The Canon and Christian Imagination*, quoted by Kathryn Matthews at [http://www.ucc.org/worship\\_samuel\\_sermon\\_seeds\\_november\\_8\\_2015](http://www.ucc.org/worship_samuel_sermon_seeds_november_8_2015)

<sup>5</sup> Kathryn Matthews, [http://www.ucc.org/worship\\_samuel\\_sermon\\_seeds\\_november\\_8\\_2015](http://www.ucc.org/worship_samuel_sermon_seeds_november_8_2015)

- It's Jesus who brings the point home for us this morning as he watches the widow put money in the treasury
  - Certainly there are some churches still doing their stewardship seasons, and the lectionary is trying to help them out
  - Don't worry- we are done with that for another year!
  - Actually it is kind of nice to preach about this widow outside of having asking for pledges and money
  - Maybe we can hear her example a bit more clearly
  - This widow who gives her last cent to God
  - It is sad that the same systemic oppression found in Ruth is still in effect,
  - Where a widow is in poverty while the scribes walk around in nice robes devouring widows' houses while saying long prayers
  - Yet once again, in the middle of our sinful systems of oppression, God is working something amazing
  - Jesus sat down opposite of the treasury, and began watching; I wonder if the disciples didn't get a little nervous about this
  - Jesus sees rich people were putting in large sums, but the widow put in two copper coins worth a penny
  - Practically nothing, right?
  - But it is this woman's generosity that catches Jesus' attention, and the fact that she gives even when she is poor
    - Not out of her abundance
  - It takes an incredible amount of faith in God to give the last of what you have, depending on God for tomorrow's very survival
  - The widow gives when she doesn't have to, like Ruth who remained kind and faithful when she did not have to
  - One more example of a godly woman who had a spirit of generosity that has inspired millions for thousands of years.
  - Let the compassion spread.
- In response to these readings, the Rev. Kathryn Matthew Huey, who serves as the dean of the Amistad Chapel in the United Church of Christ Church<sup>6</sup>
  - ...Asks this question: When has the generosity and compassion of someone else motivated us to be more compassionate and generous?

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<sup>6</sup> Kathryn Matthews, [http://www.ucc.org/worship\\_samuel\\_sermon\\_seeds\\_november\\_8\\_2015](http://www.ucc.org/worship_samuel_sermon_seeds_november_8_2015)

- When has someone like Ruth changed us, or when have we witnessed the faith of a widow and it challenge us?
- I dare say that just as powerful and just as contagious as fear, greed, and selfishness
- Compassion and Generosity is just as much so
- That in the face of our modern day xenophobes, where labels like immigrants and refugees...
- Gender, sex, and race
- The uninsured and welfare recipients- the labels that are used to divide us and make us suspicious of each other
- We can be something different
- The compassion and generosity of Ruth and this faithful widow can spread to us
- And then can catch hold around us
- With God's help we can be the start of a different kind of response even right here in Jonesboro
- Expanding our own compassion and generosity.
- That in the face of all the anxiety, fear mongering, blame casting and label making that seems so prevalent today
- We have a God who is calling us beyond it, calling us to instead speak peace and good news to everyone with everything we have
- We need more examples like Ruth, like the widow, and even Harry Potter
- The compassion and generosity that changes our future can start with us.
- Let the compassion spread.

Amen.