Ruth: Living Outside the Box –

For Scripture All of Ruth or pick what you feel is the most important verses to go with the sermon outlined here.

By living outside the box I don’t mean climbing a mountain or doing an Evil Kenevil

stunt but getting outside the box the box with imaginary walls that we set up for ourselves so we can live comfortably in our own little world. Getting outside our comfort zone and listening to God and doing his will.

 The whole book of Ruth is set in a time where the people of Israel were living outside their usual comfort zone. The book unfolds in the days when judges ruled – these were dark days for Israel –as Judges 17:6 says “when everyone did as he saw fit” the whole atmosphere of the times were not easy. Especially for a nation whose very existence was on rules and laws. Looking at the book of Ruth we see that everyone in the book is making hard decisions and living outside of their comfort zone. They chose to do things that were not normal for them, things that wouldn’t be comfortable for them but what they were called to do, what they felt they should do, they were creating history. If you think about it what would have happened if they wouldn’t have done what they were asked to do or what they thought they should do?

The book starts right out with Elimelech, Naomi and their sons Mahlon and Chilion going from Bethlehem to the land of Moab because of a famine. It seems no one else at this time left home to go where there was food. We know that Jacob took his family to Egypt because there was food. There were 75 of them not just four as we see here. They chose to go and live in Moab they chose to live outside their comfort zone. It had to be difficult and challenging for Elimelech and Naomi being Israelites, God fearing, and God worshipping people in the Land of Moab where they worshipped idols. The Moabites were distant relatives, they were descendants of Moab, the son of Lot, but they did not worship the true God. They went to live in this foreign country because of the famine.

 While they were there Elimelech died leaving Naomi alone with her two sons. The two sons married Moabite women and after about ten years the sons died leaving three widows, Naomi, Ruth and Orpah. Without the news media Naomi finds out that God had blessed Bethlehem and there is food there and she decides that she wants to go home. Another choice is made here; Naomi could have been very comfortable with her daughters-in-law after all she has been in Moab for over ten years. She has these two girls, the only ones left from her family. Naomi decides she is going home and they leave the three of them on the road that lead to Bethlehem. Naomi thinks better of taking these women away from their homes, their mother and whatever other relatives they had in Moab. Stay home where you are comfortable. Orpah makes the decision to stay, to go back home, this is a big decision for her too, to leave these women that she had been through some pretty difficult times with and they had survived and were surviving on whatever their husbands had left for them to live on. They cried and Orpah left and went back home back to her comfort zone.

Ruth in her famous speech says to Naomi, don’t make me go back, she pledges an undying loyalty to Ruth. Leaving her home, her comfort zone, giving up everyone and everything she has ever known to be with Naomi in her home, leaving her foreign gods to worship Naomi’s God to live and die with Naomi. Ruth had to have known what it was like to worship the God of Israel, because I am sure Elimelech, Naomi and the boys had worshipped God even though they were in a foreign country, even though it wasn’t comfortable. Ruth had witnessed these proceedings and knew somewhat what it was like to worship as an Israelite. Maybe Ruth wasn’t committed to worshipping the foreign gods perhaps through the example that Naomi and family had presented, Ruth had seen how it was to worship and be faithful to the one true God the God of the Israelites and wanted this for herself. She wanted to break down the walls of her box, leave what was comfortable and go with Naomi. Naomi saw she was not going to change Ruth’s mind so they went on together to Bethlehem.

 When they first got to Bethlehem the whole town was stirred up by Naomi’s return but Naomi was bitter, she had left with a husband and sons and returned empty. Here we have two widows, and widows in this time had little or no means of support so for food Ruth asked Naomi if she could go and glean the fields. Naomi said to go ahead. This also had to be difficult for Ruth, they probably had all they needed to eat in Moab, and their husbands had probably left them with some means of support. Ruth went to glean the fields, pick up what the harvesters had left behind, not the International harvesters but men with sickles and scythes. Although it seems by chance that Ruth chose the field of Boaz to pick up the grain it was very likely the work of the Lord to put her in the right place at the right time.

 Now Boaz is an interesting character in himself. The mother of Boaz is Rahab, the prostitute that lived on the wall in Jericho and kept the spies sent by Joshua, her and her family were spared when the walls fell. They went to live with the Israelites and Rahab married Salmon and they had Boaz. Now Boaz lived in Bethlehem he was a bachelor and a man of standing implying that he was not poor. Boaz sees Ruth and asks the foreman who this young woman is. He is told that she is the Moabite that has returned with Naomi. Boaz then talks to Ruth and tells her to stay in this field and with his servant girls. She would be safe there and to drink when ever thirsty and then invites her to eat with him and the harvesters. Then he also tells the harvesters to leave extra grain and not to give Ruth any trouble. Ruth once again obeyed and gleaned in the field of Boaz and Naomi and Ruth were well taken care of until the end of harvest.

 When Ruth told Naomi about Boaz and how he was watching out he was watching out for her – Naomi reveals that his is a relative and one of their kinsman-redeemers – one that could help them through their plight of being widows and create a new future for Ruth. Naomi in Chapter 3, sets out to make a home for Ruth, not with her but with Boaz. Now that the harvest was over, the food perhaps in short supply, Naomi felt it was time to set the wheels in motion and so she sent her daughter-in-law to the threshing floor where she knew that Boaz would be winnowing or getting the grain from the stocks that night. She told Ruth to wait until he had ate and drank and when he had laid down to lay at his feet – Ruth once again obeys her mother-in-law. Ruth is very obedient, although she may be wondering what this is all about. These are very likely unfamiliar practices to her, she could have very easily tried different tactics to get a man but she did as she was told and in the middle of the night Boaz realizes that someone is at his feet and asks who she is – She replies that she is Ruth and that she is a relative and Boaz praises her but also tells her that there is a closer relative that could redeem the land and that he has to have a chance to do so but if not Boaz is willing to be the redeemer.

 Ruth stays until morning, Boaz fills her shawl with grain and he went back to Bethlehem. Ruth returns and tells her mother-in-law all about the encounter with Boaz and as Naomi predicts that Boaz won’t rest until the matter of the kinsman-redeemer is settled. Boaz goes directly to the gate, now this is where the men gathered to transact business and sure enough the closer relative came along, Boaz invited him to sit and then gathered ten elders to be witness to the dealings. Boaz related the story of Naomi and Ruth and that Elimelech had a field and Naomi wanted to sell or redeem it and that he had a chance to redeem it if he wanted to but if not that Boaz himself would do so. At first the man said he would but then Boaz went on to tell him that in doing so he also would have Ruth as his wife to keep the name on the field in the family. He changed his mind and told Boaz to redeem it because he did not want to change the inheritance of his own estate. The man took off his sandal which was a sign that the deal was sealed and Boaz announced to the elders and the people of the transaction and that they were witnesses and they all agreed. They blessed Ruth as well wishing that she be like Rachel and Leah who were the builders of the house of Israel. Boaz and Ruth were married. Here we see several people out of their box or comfort zone. The closer relative to Naomi, actually defied the law by not redeeming the land, Boaz was a bachelor and could have preferred to stay that way but chose to step out of his neat little box and take a wife and the eventual possibility of a family, the responsibility he was willing to take on.

 Ruth gave birth to a son and with high praise from her Mother-in-law when Naomi took him on her lap and cared for him and the women named him Obed. The people accepted Ruth, a foreigner into their community which was highly unusual but very comforting to Ruth!

 To cover a little genealogy, which we just love to read in the Bible but this is important because – Salmon the father of Boaz, Boaz the father of Obed, Obed the father of Jesse and Jesse the father of David. This is the lineage of Christ, we see here that although not mentioned in Ruth – Rahab the prostitute is also in the lineage because of being the mother of Boaz and Ruth a Moabite also played a major role in this lineage showed that God would apply the new covenant that he was bringing in with Jesus would apply to everyone that believed not just Hebrews.

 We see that everyone in the book of Ruth was out of their box, they stepped out of their comfort zone to do and be the people that God wanted them to be, each person had their role in this story, just think that if one of them would have not listened to God, the whole course of history could have been different. But God prevailed and his will was accomplished.

 His will is accomplished in our lives too, Jesus is our Kinsmen-redeemer – he came to redeem us to buy us back into the family of God, he paid the ransom for our sins that we can be in the family of God. One of our purposes in the family of God is to be a witness to what Christ has done for us; this many times puts us out our box, the walls that we have put up as our comfort zone. To be a witness for Christ is not easy, we often feel we have failed but we need to remember that we are only the planters of the seed it is the Holy Spirit that waters and makes the seed of faith grow. We may be very surprised in heaven who taps us on the shoulder and thanks us for whatever deed or word that we might have said to get them headed in the right direction. We need to tell of what Jesus has done for us, I know in my life just lately, God has been in a situation and continues to guide us through it and in the midst of it he has reminded me of many of the times in the past where he has been the guiding force in situations that came out to a satisfactory end and I am happy to give God the thanks for all of them.

 Jesus redeemed us at a very high cost, his life; we should dedicate our lives as living sacrifices to the honor and glory of God which may very well put us out of our comfort zones and into the loving hands of Jesus our Lord.