

Ruth 1:6-18; Psalm 73:23-28; Acts 13:26-33a; John 20:1-2, 11-18

(This conversation took place between Pastor Brock and his friend, Max T. Wulf, who happens to be of the Timber Wolf genus.)

PB: This morning I brought along a friend. Some of you will recognize Max. How are you doing Max?

M: Well, you know, I am a little bit, ah, a little bit on the tired side.

PB: Well, what is going on, that you're so tired?

M: You know my Uncle Mike?

PB: Yes, I know your Uncle Mike. Is he visiting?

M: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. He and, ah, he and Aunt Jenn are in from Pittsburgh.

PB: Very fun. I'll bet you and your Uncle Mike were outside playing last night, weren't you?

M: Yeah, we were, and so was . . . Aunt Jenn.

PB: Well, ok, that sounds like it was a problem.

M: Well, you know, I really like my Uncle Mike. Yeah, yeah, yeah! He's really fun. He's adopted you know. He's a Dingo.

PB: Yes, Max, I know he's adopted. Why was it a problem to have Aunt Jen along?

M: Well, you know, she's a, she's a, well, you know, she's a . . .

PB: What, are you a little upset because Aunt Jenn's not a wolf? Aunt Jen is an Afghan Hound. She's a very pretty Afghan Hound.

M: Oh, oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, she's really cute. I like her fur. She smells really good, too. Yeah, yeah.

PB: Well then what's the problem?

M: Well, you know, Uncle Mike and I, we like to play, ah, *Follow the Bleeder* or *Hide and Go Smell*.

PB: Yes, I know. You guys really like to use your nose a lot. I understand that, but why do you have a problem with Aunt Jen. You just said she smells really nice.

M: Well, you know, but, ah, but, ah she's . . .

PB: She's what, Max?

M: She's a . . . girl.

PB: O.K., but why is that a problem, Max?

M: You know, 'cuz, you know, 'cuz, 'cuz girls are

PB: You be really careful with what you're going to say. So what is the problem with Aunt Jen being a girl?

M: Well, you know, 'cuz I just wanna play with, you know, play with the guys!

PB: Oh, Max. You know what? Just because your Aunt Jen is a girl, doesn't mean she is any less fun than when you guys are out playing. It doesn't make her any less fun of a playmate for you and Uncle Mike and the whole pack. Remember when you and Harold first started to be friends?

M: Yeah. What?

PB: You remember that you were getting grief from the Coyote Brothers, because they were making fun of you and Harold, because Harold's a rabbit. They didn't understand why a wolf could be friends with a rabbit.

M: Yeah, but, but, he's Harold! He's my friend! And you know, he's a, well, he's, he's, he's a boy.

PB: Max, just because he's a boy doesn't mean that he's a better friend for you than your Aunt Jen could be. As a matter of fact, God wants us to play with everybody. Not just boys play with boys, and girls play with girls. God wants everybody to learn how get along with each other and how to get play with each other. As a matter of fact, the lessons we had today were all about some very strong women in the Bible. We started off with a story about a woman named Naomi, and her daughter-in-law Ruth.

M: What?

PB: Naomi, her name is Naomi.

M: No, No, did't you say someone else?

PB: Ruth

M: What?

PB: Ruth.

M: Why are you barking?

PB: No, no. Not *roof*, Max. I am saying Ruth. R- u- t- h. Naomi and her daughter-in-law, Ruth. Naomi had moved, along with her husband, far away. They had moved from the land of Judah to Moab, which is right next door. But it's still a long way. Probably about as far as to go from here to Pittsburgh. But it's a foreign country

M: Kinda like Pittsburgh.

PB: I *guess* you could say that it's kind of like Pittsburgh. It was similar in a lot of respects, but it was different. They had a different religion and different customs in way of doing things. While Naomi was living there - she moved there with her husband. Her husband's name was Elimelech. How would you like that for a name?

M: Ah-what?

PB: E-lim-e-lech.

M: . . . I'll stick with Max.

PB: I think that would be a good idea. But Naomi and Elimelech moved to Moab, and had two sons. An unfortunate thing happened in that Elimelech died. So Naomi very quickly got wives for both her sons so they could start families, but then a really, really sad thing happened, and that was that both her sons died.

M: That, that IS kinda sad.

PB: Yeah, I thought so. So here were these three women, Naomi and her two daughters in law, Orpah and Ruth. And Naomi decided that she would go from Moab back to the country of Judah. Kind of like going from Pittsburgh back here. She set off and she remembered that Orpah and Ruth were from Moab, and so she said to them, 'You should really stay there. You should really stay there and be with your own people.' Orpah eventually agreed, but Ruth said this great thing to her. She said, 'Naomi, it doesn't matter. I married into your family and you are like a mother to me. I am never going to leave you.' That was a really wonderful thing for Ruth to say to Naomi.

M: That is kinda of nice. Yeah. We do kind of stuff like that in the pack. We bond with each other. Of course, there's biting involved. . .

PB: Ok, Max, we don't need to hear about that. Ruth and Naomi went back to Judah and, as a matter of fact, in Judah, eventually they were able to settle down. Naomi was able to get Ruth introduced to a man, one of Naomi's relatives, a man named Boaz.

M: What's with these names?

PB: Yes, I know. You go home tonight and thank your mom for naming you a nice simple name like Max, instead of a name like Elimelech or Boaz. But Ruth and Boaz were able to get married and had a good life together. They had children together. Naomi was taken care of as well for the rest of her life. That's the story of two very strong women who were able to overcome a lot of odds against them. Because, you know, when Naomi's husband and her sons all died, it's kind of unfortunate, but at that time and place in history, without having a man in their lives, those women were not really well accepted within that society. It was kinda like when you and Harold became friends. You know, the pack was making a little bit of fun of you, and the Coyote Brothers were making fun of you.

M: But, Harold's a nice guy! You know, we run and jump and play a lot, and, I, you know, I even stopped eating rabbits because of him.

PB: Yes, I know, I know you did. That's very good, that's very nice of you.

M: I eat chicken now.

PB: Yes, I know you eat chicken

M: You know why?

PB: *Why* do you eat chicken, Max?

M: Tastes like rabbit!

PB: Alright, Max. But when you and Harold first became friends, the other animals, sort of shunned you. They didn't want to play with you guys because you and Harold were friends. That's kind of like the way other people were looking at Ruth and Naomi because they didn't have a man as part of their family, as part of their life.

M: That IS kinda weird, yeah.

PB: Almost as weird as you not wanting to play with Aunt Jen, just because she is a girl.

M: No. No. That's not weird.

PB: Yes, I think it *is* weird. Tell you what, let me try another example.

The other story we heard we were was about a lady named Mary and she was from Magdalen. Mary was one of the followers of Jesus, you know, like the disciples, the twelve disciples.

M: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, those guys, I know them.

PB: Ok, Mary also followed around with Jesus, along with several other women. Some people think they know all kind of things about Mary. They think that she was a prostitute, or they think that she was married to Jesus. Some people think that she was the woman at the well in Samaria. But none of those things are supported by the Bible. The only things that we know for sure from the Bible, is that she was a follower of Jesus just like lots of people, but more importantly we know that she was one of the very few people who was there when Jesus was hung on the cross. She was one of the very few people who helped bury him. And she was, as we heard in our lesson today, she was the first person to see him risen out of the grave.

That's how important Mary was. It wasn't Peter, it wasn't John, and it wasn't any of the "guys": it was a woman. It was a *woman* who hung around and watched Jesus die. It was a *woman* who helped bury him (along with a man named Joseph). And it was most importantly a *woman*, Mary, that first saw Jesus when he rose up.

M: Wow. So, girls are O.K.

PB: Yes Max, girls are O.K. They were important to Jesus and to his ministry, they are important in our life here at the church because there are women who do all kinds of things. Normally, Pastor Easton is up here, doing a much better sermon than I can do, and she is a girl.

M: Are you sure?

PB: Yes, I am very sure that Pastor Easton is a girl. She happens to be on vacation today. Mrs. Enney, who does the children's sermons that you like, is a girl.

M: Awww!

PB: Yes, Mrs. Enny is a girl.

M: But she's nice!

PB: Max, that doesn't have any thing to do with whether somebody is a girl. It doesn't matter one way or another. Who else do we know? What about all the people over there in the band? There's a bunch of women over there.

M: Oh, man, I'm . . .

PB: So you see Max, God can use women in all kinds of way, but you know what? God can use guys too.

M: Are you, are, are, are you sure? I'm startin' to doubt that one.

PB: Don't doubt that Max, because God can use all of us, no matter what. God can use us even though we wear glasses. God can use us even if we are left-handed, God can use us if we are overweight, God can use us if we are short, God can use us if we are tall, God can use us if we have blond hair, or black hair, brown hair, or even no hair. God can use us, no matter what. That's really the amazing thing. That's what we are trying to get across in our lessons this morning, I think. No matter what, God can use us.

Here is something else that I didn't tell you earlier. Remember the story of Ruth and Naomi, right?

M: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. They traveled from Pittsburgh

PB: Kind of they traveled from Pittsburgh. But remember, Ruth married a man called Boaz.

M: Yeah, yeah, yeah. He sounds like a bone. "Boh - az"

PB: Alright, Max. Thing is, if you were to look in the Bible, and looked in Matthew's gospel, the first chapter, at the list of all the people, all of ancestors of Jesus, do you know what would be in there?

M: Words?

PB: Yes, you would see words. But those words are names. And you know what names you see in that list of names of who all came before Jesus?

M: Ahhh. . . . no.

PB: You see the names of Ruth and Boaz, because they had a son, and their son had a son, and that son had a son, all the way down to Jesus. So Ruth and Boaz are important as well, because not only does it show what strong women Ruth and Naomi were. But that Ruth, this woman from Moab, this woman who was not even from the land of Judah, God used in order to help bring Jesus into this world. So, if God can use this woman from Moab, and God can use me, and God can use even you. . . .

M: Are you sure?

PB: Yes, I'm very sure about that. You know what? God can use each and everybody who is sitting out here, no matter what. No matter how talented we are, or how talented we think we might not be. No matter what we do. No matter where we go, God can use each and every one of these people, to help tell other people how much God loves us, how much God wants us to forgive up. He can use each and everyone sitting out here to help others

in need. God can use us in whatever way is needed. It doesn't matter if we're male or female, if we're a wolf or a rabbit; none of that's important. What's most important is that God loves us just the way that we are, and God can use us just the way that we are.

And so now, I think I'm going to say 'Amen.'

M: It's about time.