**The Quartet of the Vulnerable, Sermon 1**

Eric Lintala

# Intro: (2 min)

* Who I am
  + Father, Son, CCE Manager, Gardener, lover of people

# Goals of Sermon Series: (1 min)

* To orient our eyes and hearts towards God’s expansive heart for the hurt and suffering.
* To show how God has worked in and through the vulnerable from the beginning.
* To challenge and encourage you and me to emulate Christ in our lives, through the power of the Spirit

# Key Assumptions & Prayer: (3 min)

* God cares deeply about justice and calls us to pursue it through
  + Doing what is right in our relationships
  + Actively seeking out those who are in vulnerable situations
  + Eliel’s sermon on May 14th taught that:
* All of us will feel uncomfortable, challenged, angry, and possibly even offended, over the next four weeks
  + When it is because of my words, I apologize
    - Talking from my experiences and the experiences of those that I am in relationship with.
    - I don’t know your story, nor your passions
  + When it is because of God’s Word, I urge you to lean in
    - I have experienced all of these and more over the last weeks as I have been studying, praying, and listening.
    - I pray for forgiveness if at any point I lead us away from God’s Word, and I pray for boldness to speak God’s Word clearly.
* Would you pray with me?

# The Quartet of the Vulnerable in the OT (2 min)

* Phrase cultivated by Christian philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff about the four groups of people in the most vulnerable situations named throughout the OT and NT. Often, they are brought up in groups of two or three. Here is the clearest passages that will guide our time:
  + Zechariah 7:9-10 – “This is what the Lord almighty said [to Zechariah]: ‘Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the foreigner or the poor. Do not plot evil against each other.’”
  + **Others to note:** Deuteronomy 10:18-19; 24:17-22; 27:19, Psalm 72:1-4; 82 Isaiah 1:17; 10:1-2
  + Definitions are so important as we read through scripture. One of the main things I want to point us to is that all four of these definitions are dynamic. For example, when we think about the orphan and the widow, we are also thinking of the foster child, the childless, and the fatherless.
  + Layered vulnerability

**Plan for Today:**

1. Why Israel is called to act justly towards the Quartet of the Vulnerable
2. How God works in and through the Quartet of the Vulnerable in the story of Ruth
3. A reminder of who God is

# Israel Has to Respond with Justice Because: (4 min)

* **God redeemed Israel from Egypt**
  + Leviticus 19:33, Deuteronomy 24:17-18, 22
  + Deuteronomy 24:17-18 – “Do not deprive the foreigner or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge. Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this. “
  + Israel is a chosen people of orphans, widows, foreigners, and the poor.
* **Israel is Commanded to imitate God** 
  + Isaiah 58:6-10, Psalm 113:7-8
    - Isaiah 58:6-10

“Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:  
to loose the chains of injustice  
    and untie the cords of the yoke,  
to set the oppressed free  
    and break every yoke?  
**7**Is it not to share your food with the hungry  
    and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—  
when you see the naked, to clothe them,  
    and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?  
**8**Then your light will break forth like the dawn,  
    and your healing will quickly appear;  
then your righteousness[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=isaiah+58&version=NIV#fen-NIV-18795a)] will go before you,  
    and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard.  
**9**Then you will call, and the Lord will answer;  
    you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I.

“If you do away with the yoke of oppression,  
    with the pointing finger and malicious talk,  
**10**and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry  
    and satisfy the needs of the oppressed,  
then your light will rise in the darkness,  
    and your night will become like the noonday.

* + Yahweh is a God of justice, undoing injustice and working on the behalf of the poor and oppressed.
  + *Live Just.ly*, 96 as well as *Inalienable* and *When Helping Hurts* and *Becoming Whole* (126-127).
* **God loves justice and Hates Injustice**
  + Isaiah 59:15, 61:8, Psalm 37:28; 82; 99:4
  + Isaiah 61:8 – “For I, the Lord, love justice; I hate robbery and wrongdoing. In my faithfulness I will reward my people and make an everlasting covenant with them.”
* Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Justice –* “The prophets and psalmist do not argue the case that alleviating the plight of the lowly is required by justice. *They assume* it... They save their breath for urging their readers to actually *practice* justice to the quartet of the vulnerable low ones” (Wolterstorff, 76).
* The Bible is full of stories that demonstrate God’s heart towards justice for the vulnerable. In honor of Father’s Day, let’s examine the story of Ruth.

# Story of Ruth

Second Half of message

# *Who is Naomi?*

**Ruth 1:1-5** - In the days when the judges ruled, there was a **famine in the land**. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, **went to live for a while in the country of Moab**. The man’s name was Elimelek, his wife’s name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there. Now **Elimelek, Naomi’s husband, died**, and she was left with her two sons. They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, both **Mahlon and Kilion also died**, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

* **In first 5 verses, Naomi becomes poor, a foreigner, a widow, childless, and bitter.** 
  + *Maybe? Naomi not coming back to Bethlehem with celebration, as she wanted, but as a childless widow with another childless widow who was a foreigner. “This is not the triumphant homecoming she had dreamed of through all those years in Moab, the type of homecoming immigrants still long for today. The two times my entire family returned to Guatemala after we migrated to the United States were filled with joyful celebration at our arrival. Friends and family hired marimba bands and hosted parties for us, and my parents brought gifts for everyone. These are the kind of homecomings that immigrants dream of, when they return happier and better off. But Naomi’s return is enveloped in grief and loss” (González, 27).*
* *Not a Disney fairytale of two women being saved by a white knight in shining armor.*
  + *“…it’s true that Ruth and Naomi are poor and vulnerable. But they are not helpless. They conspire for their survival…as they share ‘love, history, and hope together’” (González, 31).*
* Multi-layered vulnerability
* Quartet co-existing together

# *Who is Ruth?*

* Let’s continue on: **Ruth 1:6-7, 22**

“When Naomi heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah… So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.”

* **Ruth becomes a widow, childless, poor, an orphan, and a foreigner**
  + *Not just any foreigner. A Moabite*
  + The law is clear that Moabites are not to be admitted to assembly of God
  + Deuteronomy 23:3, Nehemiah 13:1-3, 23 -27
  + **Deuteronomy 23:3-4, 6** - No Ammonite or Moabite or any of their descendants may enter the assembly of the Lord, not even in the tenth generation. For they did not come to meet you with bread and water on your way when you came out of Egypt, and they hired Balaam son of Beor from Pethor in Aram Haraiam to pronounce a curse on you… Do not seek a treaty of friendship with them as long as you live.
  + Let’s continue.

**Ruth 2:5-12** – “Boaz asked the overseer of his harvesters, “Who does that young woman belong to?” The overseer replied, “She is the Moabite who came back from Moab with Naomi. She said, **‘Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters**.’ She came into the field and has remained here from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter.” So Boaz said to Ruth, “My daughter, listen to me. Don’t go and glean in another field and don’t go away from here. Stay here with the women who work for me. Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the women. I have told the men not to lay a hand on you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled.”  At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She asked him, “Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?”

Boaz replied, “I’ve been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband—how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.”

# Why Boaz’s Response is so Noble:

* **Boaz treats Ruth with respect. He gives her dignity, even though she is a Moabite. Why?**
* **He matches Ruth’s nobility (vss. 11-12)**
* **He acts counter-culturally**
  + It is not a new thing for those with power to oppress those without it
  + Widows, ***specifically***childless widows, ***more specifically***poor, childless widows, ***especially***foreign, poor, childless widows, ***most especially***guardian-less, foreign, poor, childless widows were the lowest of the low in that society.
  + Especially vulnerable and taken advantage of
  + **Nick Wolterstorff - The Quartet of the Vulnerable “are not only disproportionately vulnerable to injustice but usually disproportionately actual victims of injustice. Injustice is not equally distributed. The low ones enjoy those goods to which they have a right – food, clothing, voice, security, whatever – far less than do the high and mighty ones” 79).**
  + This continues today. Foreign women are more likely to be abused and exploited than any other group of people.
    - **More than 60% of immigrant women crossing border to the U.S. are sexually assaulted – Amnesty International (González, 54)**
    - **Up to 80% of trafficking victims in the U.S. are foreign-born women and girls (González, 54)**
  + These statistics, and the lives they represent, make us uncomfortable and angry, *and they should.* 
    - Remember, one of the goals of this series is “to orient our eyes and hearts towards God’s expansive heart for the hurt and suffering.”
    - As we become more like Christ, our hearts break with His.
    - As the Spirit moves inside of us, we see others with God’s heart,
    - And as we better understand God’s Word, we follow Him more fully.
  + This is exactly what Boaz did. What truly makes Boaz noble is that:
* **He Follows the Law**

**Deuteronomy 24:19, 22** – “When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands… Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. That is why I command you to do this.

* + Yes, he was one of Naomi’s and Ruth’s Kinsman Redeemers.
  + Yes, he had a crush on Ruth.
  + But, at the end of the day, all Boaz did was listen to God.
  + He simply tells his workers to do what God had already commanded them to do.
  + **Karen Gonzalez, *The God Who Sees* – “as a follower of the God of Israel, Boaz is actually *not* free to act in any other way. Boaz simply does what God’s law commands” (González, 30).**

# Who is Ruth?

* **Faithful** (1:16-18)
  + *Ruth 1:16-17 – But Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.”*
  + *“These words were spoken by one widow to another during the worst of times, after a series of devastating losses: infertility, death, widowhood, abject poverty, and forced migration” (González, 23).*
* **Determined** (2:2-3)
  + *And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, “Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor.” Naomi said to her, “Go ahead, my daughter.” So she went out, entered a field and began to glean behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she was working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelek.*
* **Courageous** (3:1-9)
  + *Ruth 3:5-6 - “I will do whatever you say,” Ruth answered. So she went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do.*
* **Resilient** (1:8-15)
  + *Ruth 1:11-13 - But Naomi said, “Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons— would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord’s hand has turned against me!”*
* **Noble** (3:11)
  + *And now, my daughter, don’t be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All the people of my town know that you are a woman of noble character.*
* **Blessed** (4:13-22)
  + *Ruth 4:13-17 - So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When he made love to her, the Lord enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. The women said to Naomi: “Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth.” Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him. The women living there said, “Naomi has a son!” And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.*
* Ruth is a special story for me because of the work God has done in my life through widows
  + I want to take a moment to name four women like Ruth, without whom I wouldn’t be who I am today:
    - Marilyn Merrigan, Mabel, Berniece McGovern, Grace Russo
* **Margo Schlanger – “Ruth the Moabite went first from Gentile to Jew, and then from widow to wife, stranger to citizen, gleaner to matriarch, childless to the (great) grandmother of a king.”** – (*Inalienable*, 137).
* This is not where the story of scripture ends. Generations later, Ruth’s descendant, Jesus opened the door of the Quartet of the vulnerable to so many more.

# When We Don’t Respond with Justice

* **Our God is a God who sees**. Our God saw Ruth and Naomi. He sees you. He sees me. He sees all those made in his image. He is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Our God is a God of Justice, even we aren’t people of justice
* **Our God is a forgiving God when we are unjust and turn away from him**
  + Exodus 34:6-7, Psalm 79:9; 85:2; 103:2-3, Isaiah 33:24, Micah 7:18-19, Jonah 4:2

# End of Sermon

* **Rabbi Arthur Waskow asks, “If Ruth came to America today, what would happen to her?... Would she be admitted at the border?”** (González, 33).
* **What about her descendant Jesus when his family fled Bethlehem?**
  + We will answer this question next week. I’ll give you a hint though… they wouldn’t

**Benediction**

May the peace of the Lord Christ go with you: wherever he may send you; may he guide you through the wilderness: protect you through the storm; may he bring you home rejoicing: at the wonders he has shown you; may he bring you home rejoicing: once again into our doors. Amen. Go in peace.