

My People, My God

“Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.” Ruth 1:16

They were simple baby tears from a precious little girl who was over-tired and missed her momma. So I rocked her, whispered prayers, and sang about Jesus. My singing had softened to a hum and in the quietness of our cuddling a creak in the rocking chair drew my thoughts...

You see, the rocking chair came from her great-great grandmother, and it had been doing its job for more than 100 years. I thought about the weary arms that had rested in this chair; an old pastor from rural Minnesota, godly farmers that loved their land, women that loved Jesus, and mothers that lovingly nurtured their children. They were quiet, humble people that worked hard and were kind to others. This was the family I married into—generations of German Lutheran immigrants who settled in the Midwest; people who recognized that a new life in a new land was a gracious gift from a good God.

As I recounted the blessings to my husband's family, I thought of Ruth, who spoke the words, “Your people will be my people and your God my God” (Ruth 1:16). Ruth, a Moabite, married into an Israelite family and became a part of God's family by grace. Does that make you wonder how different it was for her to live in a home that belonged to the Lord of Israel? Do you think she was in awe of a loving God who had made a covenant of grace? Did she joyfully embrace the new life and family she had been given? Yes. Undoubtedly, yes.

But tragedy left Ruth and her mother-in-law widowed and Naomi was determined to return to Bethlehem alone. Ruth would not let her leave. “Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.” Ruth's famous words did not merely reflect a love for her mother-in-law, but faith in the God of Israel and love for his people. She wasn't weighing the best place to find another husband, she was being led by the Holy Spirit to walk by faith. She was compelled by the love of God to remain a part of his family; to live with “my people” and “my God.”

My People

The people Ruth had grown to love in Naomi's home were no different than those we love today. People washed into the family of God through baptism though they didn't deserve it, sinners who are loved and forgiven because they have a merciful God. Paul points us to the grace of God when he quotes Hosea, “I will call them ‘my people’ who are not my people” (Romans 9:25). He reminds us that we all came from outside the family of God. We were hostile to God and one another, born in the sinful image of man. But now, as his people, we are so intimately connected to the Lord and one another that we are called the body of Christ. We are hands and feet that cherish our eyes and ears and inner parts. We are a people as diverse as the world yet individually designed by a Creator God to be part of a family. Grasp the richness of that concept! We are a family, a body, a people united in Christ; filled with love, called to live in forgiveness and given one purpose!

Ruth's words, “My people” ring with a sense of confident belonging; and her words continue to echo the blessing that is ours as well. God has given us relationships in Christ that will bless us in ways we cannot imagine. Brothers and sisters that stand beside us in faith when we struggle;

unknown people of prayer that lift us up before our Mighty God. My people—our people—are those who have gone before us in faith, those who worship with us in church, and those who share our faith in Jesus as the only Savior from sin. Yes, they are our babies and our grandparents and our family members—but our “people” are those who have been chosen by God and bound together through the cleansing blood of Christ. We are given these relationships to reflect Christ in a world of Moabites; to walk together in a bond of love like Ruth and Naomi through tragedy and blessing. He made us a holy nation, a “people belonging to God” (1 Peter 2:9), to declare his praise in worship, prayer and Christian living. This is what it means to belong and to be a people; to live united in the holiness that was given by our gracious God!

My God

But earthly love and belonging are not enough. God's desire is to bring all his children home for an eternity of perfect glory. He gave his Son, Jesus to die on a cross and make each one of us a child of God—and being called *his* child is very, very personal. That is my God. That is your God. It is our God who comes with promises of forgiveness and everlasting life. It is our God who has been faithful to generation after generation. Our God is holy, righteous and all powerful; he searches our hearts and knows our deepest thoughts. God is our compassionate and gracious Father, abounding in love and faithfulness. He is the creator of the earth and the author of salvation, yet he has called us by name and says, “You are mine” (Isaiah 43:1).

It's hard to fathom the infinite majesty of a Holy God and realize that he not only knows me—he loves me! The personal relationship we have with him comes through the blood of Christ. This is not a generic “spirituality” that strives to transcend social existence but a real, living relationship with a real, living God. And the Lord understands us so well that he gave us ways to grow in our relationship—things we can touch to deepen our faith. We have the Word of God and Sacraments where he comes to us over and over again, not to just speak of love, but to actually strengthen our faith. “My God” proclaims the connection we have with the Lord because of grace and the means through which he strengthens our faith; it is personal, intimate, and living. The power of Ruth's confession is ours, but even more, Ruth's God is our God. Rejoice in the overwhelming truth that you have an amazing God who sacrificed his Son to make you his own. He is your God.

Many believers were born into Christian families and renewed through the holy waters of baptism. Some believers have spouses and in-laws that encourage their faith. But all of us have grace from a loving God and the fellowship that comes as a gift from his hand. We have people and more importantly we have our saving God!