

## Moments of Joy - Isaiah, Ruth & Us

(Preached @ Footscray Baptist Church by Cheryl Williams, December 11<sup>th</sup>, 2022 - Matthew 1:1-6 & Isaiah 35:1-10)

I wonder what brings you joy. Not just what makes you happy but that which deep in your soul calms you, satisfies you and that lasts. Maybe it is watching the children or grandchildren grow into kind and loving people. Maybe it is the kindness of a neighbour. Maybe it is the special drawing a child has done for you. Maybe it is feeling the wind in your hair as you watch the waves crash to shore. Or the song of a native bird or laugh of a kookaburra. Or eating the first fruit off your tree and then giving the rest away. Maybe it is the company of old friends.

For Isaiah, joy was seen and experienced in the seemingly impossible. The Simpson Desert coming alive with the red and black colours of Sturt Desert Peas, those who could not see having the ability to view things, those who could not hear being able to hear the voice of a loved one for the first time, the disabled jumping with joy, streams of water gushing over Uluru. Gladness and peace replacing sorrow and conflict.

During this third week of Advent, we celebrate the joy Christmas brings, not just fleeting moments of happiness or pleasure, but long-lasting joy. This week we learn of yet another woman in Jesus' family tree – Ruth.

Ruth is the daughter in law of Rahab and probably better known than some of the other woman listed in the family tree. She is a foreigner as well; she came from Moab. Ruth had married into a family who had left Bethlehem in the time of famine and sought refuge in Moab. Her father-in-law had died and after about ten years of marriage her husband died leaving her a widow and childless. Then her brother-in-law died too, leaving her mother-in-law a widow and childless and her sister-in-law in the same situation. Naomi, her mother-in-law, decides she will return to Bethlehem to her family now that the famine was over. As she has no way of supporting her daughters-in-law she suggests they return to their families as well, and hopes and prays that they might find new husbands, that they might experience the same kindness they had shown her. One daughter-in-law goes back to her family. Ruth however will not go back; she utters the most stunning words of commitment you will find in the bible –

‘where you go I will go,  
where you stay I will stay,  
your people will be my people,  
your God my God  
where you die, there I will be buried’ (Ruth 1:16)

So together Ruth and Naomi arrive in Bethlehem. The harvest was just beginning, and, as was permitted by law, Ruth gleans the excess wheat from the fields to support her mother-in-law and herself. The owner of the field is Boaz who it turns out is distantly related to Naomi. To cut a long story short, using the law of Levirate marriage (the obligation that younger relatives of a deceased person should marry their widow in order

to keep the bloodline going), Boaz marries Ruth. In time they have a child called Obed. Naomi is delighted and overjoyed, as no doubt Ruth is as well. This child becomes the father of Jesse who then becomes the father of the shepherd boy David who will become king.

So here we have another foreign woman, an outsider who becomes a great-great-grandmother of Jesus. A woman whose deep sadness and loss is turned to joy. A woman whose kindness and commitment leads to joy.

Like Tamar and Rahab before her, she shows us how God uses those on the margins, outsiders to accomplish his purposes. Together they help us understand the truly universal story of God and Jesus.

As we move closer to Christmas, we will find other characters overjoyed at what happens to them. Initially they might be afraid, even devastated (in Joseph's case), or not quite able to understand what is happening. but that fear and confusion turns to joy. Elizabeth when she meets with Mary, who has tried to run away from her problems, experiences joy as she meets, in her words, her Saviour. Angels announcing joy to shepherds, to Mary, to Joseph.

Our world, in the midst of confusion, conflict and devastation needs such joy.

“Joy looks like a desert in bloom – Isaiah 35:1

Joy looks like the tongue of the speechless singing – Isaiah 35:6

Joy looks like people travelling together without getting lost – Isaiah 35:8

Joy looks like justice – Psalm 146:7

Joy looks like freedom – Psalm 146:7

Joy looks like ruin to the wicked – Psalm 146:9

Joy looks like power deflated – Luke 1:52

Joy looks like a promise still waiting – James 5:7

Joy looks like preparation – Matthew 11:10<sup>1</sup>

Joy looks like the delight of a mother-in-law cradling the grandchild she hoped for. but thought was not possible.

Joy to the world, the Lord has come, let earth receive her King.

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<sup>1</sup> Rachel G Hackenburg, found on RevGalBlogPals