

## The Kindnesses of God are Sure

† In grief (vv.1-5)

† In deliverance (vv.6-19)

In the name of Jesus, our divine Kinsman Redeemer, dearly beloved of God:

After one of the driest summers on record these several weeks of rain seem especially gloomy. Aren't you glad ours is not just another "sunshine faith" the kind that shines fine when the sun is out but bogs down in the gloom of clouds and storm? By the power of God's Holy Spirit in Word and sacraments, the faith of Bible believers has always burned more brightly in times of trouble and heartache. Satan tries with deadly force to overcome the fortresses of God, but faith fires back like the Christians of the old Byzantine Empire with their secret recipe of "Greek fire." The more their attackers tried to put out the flames with water, the more they spread. And the more Satan tries to douse the flames of faith the brighter they burn. Faith-filled reason: **The Kindnesses of God are Sure**, especially...

† In grief (vv.1-5)

One of the saddest characteristics of our culture is unfaithfulness. Hollywood's *Desperate Housewives*, Oprah's sorry mistresses and mistreated wives, reveal the pollution of selfish pleasure. Which only makes the story of Ruth more beautiful with bright faithfulness in the darkest hours of **grief**.

It's hard for us to relate in a land where one of our greatest challenges is not eating too much. When a trip to the refrigerator or drive-through may be all the exercise we get in a day, how can you imagine fleeing to a foreign country from famine? The ancients were mostly farmers living from one harvest to the next. Without freeways to move fruitful produce to drought stricken grain belts, a few years of iron skies and cracked earth could spell disaster for hundreds of thousands in death by starvation.

So it was around Bethlehem in 1200 or 1300 B.C. A man named Elimelech had to take his wife Naomi and their two sons to the foreign land of Moab just to survive. You want breakfast at Perkins? Don't even think about it. Looking for lodging with fine dining? Try a rock in a dry creek bed where maybe you can get out of the wind for a while. Who can worry about his waistline if you're wasting away to skin and bones. And the worst would be watching your loved ones suffer.

How he died, we don't know. But without her husband Elimelech, Naomi must have really cherished her two sons. Yet there is **grief** even in their names. Mahlon means "sickly," as if good health ran away and left him weak all his life. And Kilion means "pining," which suggests their family had known its share of sadness long before tragedy struck. Maybe the marriage of the brothers to Orpah and Ruth took the edge off her pain for a while. But who can imagine Naomi's **grief** when the time came to bury the last of her men? Nothing was left but her own tears and the Moabite widows of her two sons.

Where do you go **In grief**? Some try to hide in a bottle. Some will play the blame game as if more **grief** will somehow help them feel better. And some just shrivel up and die. You really can't blame Naomi for what she later told the other Jewish women: "**Don't call me Naomi....Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter.**" (1:20 NIV) With no Social Security, no life insurance, no education or jobs for women, the destitution of widows could only be surpassed by a widow who lost a son. But to lose both sons is beyond description. Bitterness against God at losses so extreme would be understandable except for something faith alone can see: **The Kindnesses of God are Sure**.

You cannot know how **Sure** until you struggle through dismal days and dark nights of insecurity. Think about it. If the wind never blew, couldn't we all live in tents? If lakes never freeze, who needs a fireplace? In a Minnesota blizzard insulated walls around a fuel efficient furnace can only be more cozy if you first spend a night in the ditch. That's why we say, "The night is often darkest just before the

dawn.” Why I counsel Christians to look up in hope when problems seem the worst because they’re finally coming to a head. Relief comes quietly. “God knows full well when times of gladness Shall be the needful thing for thee. When He has tried thy soul with sadness And from all guile has found thee free, He comes to thee all unaware And makes thee own His loving care.” (TLH 518:4) **In grief** you see clearly **The Kindnesses of God are Sure...**

### ✠ **In deliverance (vv.6-19)**

You can’t always tell someone this. Sometimes the best you can do is be a friend and listen. We often have to travel for miles under the clouds before the sun breaks through. *“We walk by faith, not by sight.”* (2 Corinthians 5:7 KJV) Did you notice when things began to brighten for Naomi? **Deliverance** came from what she heard. *“When she heard in Moab that the Lord had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, Naomi 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.”* The Word of God put her feet on the path to **deliverance**.

She must have lived up to her name. “Naomi” means, “my delight.” What was it that made this mother-in-law so dear to her daughters-in-law that they would leave their own families to cross so many miles of searing desert for a foreign land? Deep down in her heart Naomi was a *delight* because she was always thinking of others. She could have gone on and on about how lonely she would be without them. Instead she set aside her triple grief and counseled her daughters-in-law that she could no longer do anything for them. Immediate miracles like a new husband that night and boys in the morning, would still take a lifetime shut up as young women waiting for grown men. In beautiful, unselfish love, Naomi thought that the LORD’s **deliverance** for her daughters meant staying in Moab.

Kilion’s widow agreed. Tears and a kiss sent Orpah on her way. But Ruth held on. Something Naomi and her men had modeled so many years made the long journey to the Promised Land the only way home. But Moses’ law clearly stipulated: *“No...Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, even down to the tenth generation. For they did not come to meet you with bread and water...when you came out of Egypt, and they hired Balaam...to pronounce a curse on you.”* (Deuteronomy 23:3f NIV) Though Moabites were not welcome in Israel, Ruth wanted God anyway.

Naomi sensed Mahlon’s widow getting stubborn. Without a shred of doubt Ruth insisted, “Enough of that!” Her famous confession of faith has found its way into many wedding sermons. But isn’t it ironic they were spoken by a widowed daughter-in-law to her widowed mother-in-law with no marriage prospects for either of them? *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 anything but death separates you and me.”*

Ruth swore in the LORD’s Name because she was so confident of His grace and blessing. In the God of Israel who made Naomi a delight Ruth saw **deliverance** from Him whose **Kindnesses are forever Sure**. But she could not know then how right she really was. If Christian faith burns like “Greek fire” under Satan’s assaults in time, think how brightly it will burn in the eternal **deliverance** of heaven. Our kindhearted God had many miracles stored up for Ruth. In four sweet chapters the Holy Spirit leads us to her wedding night with older bachelor Boaz. God fills in the family tree of Ruth as the great grandmother of King David. Great David’s Greater Son is Jesus the Son of God who washed our sins away with His own holy blood. Faith in Jesus is the only faith “that shines more bright and clear When tempests rage without, That when in danger, knows no fear, In darkness feels no doubt. Lord, give us such a faith as this, And then, whate’er may come, We’ll taste e’en now the hallowed bliss Of an eternal home.” (CW 405:3,6) **In grief, In deliverance – The Kindnesses of God are Sure** for Christ is Lord of all. Amen.