

*St James UMC—*

*The church with a warm heart, and a  
vision to be disciples of Jesus Christ,  
sharing God's love with others  
to transform the world!*



St James UMC  
1501 Franklin St  
Bellevue, NE 68123

Phone: 402-291-3881

Fax: 402-291-1604

e-mail: [stjames.umc@warmheart.org](mailto:stjames.umc@warmheart.org)

# FAR FROM HOME



*A Sermon Series from the Book of Ruth  
For personal, small-group, and family study.*

**August 16—September 13**

**ST JAMES UNITED METHODIST CHURCH**

Bellevue, Nebraska

[www.come2stjames.org](http://www.come2stjames.org)

*"One Congregation. . . Two Locations"*

By Pastors Russ Tompkins and Jason Kennedy



## “LIVE A LIFE THAT MAT-

### ± A Vision for St. James in 2009

“The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise” (Proverbs 11:29). When church feels like it’s something we just do or a place we’ve always gone, when we feel like we keep giving, but are never getting anything back, and when we think we’ve discovered all there is to learn and experience in our Christian Faith... that is when we have the most need to step out of the old and into a new understanding of what it means to be the church!

Our vision at St. James is to be disciples of Jesus Christ, sharing God’s love with others. Although we struggle with things that feel like routine duties, and at times we just don’t know how, where, or with what we could do more with what we have, each of us is truly called to *live a life that matters*. We see this kind of passion and commitment in every aspect of Jesus’ life as he changed the way the entire world would know itself. As we grow in our discipleship and increase the love of God we share with others, we will find ourselves truly living lives that matter.

This year, we are encouraging and challenging all people of faith at St. James to *live lives that matter*. We talk about our faith often; now let’s see it make a difference in the world. With this focus, we intend to find new ways and new inspirations to take our faith beyond the book and into our lives and world. Each week we will bring to you practical ideas and tools for doing so. Not only will those around us feel the impact, but we too will feel in our hearts the effects of living lives that make changes in the world!

“For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is also dead” (James2:26).

~Pastors Russ & Jason

*For the LORD will not forsake his people; he will not abandon his heritage; for justice will return to the righteous, and all the upright in heart will follow it (Psalm 94:14-15).*



### ± Closer to Home:

“Church isn’t where you meet. Church isn’t a building. Church is what you do. Church is who you are. Church is the human outworking of the person of Jesus Christ. Let’s not go to Church, let’s be the Church” (Bridget Willard).

“Take from the church the miraculous, the supernatural, the incomprehensible, the unreasonable, the impossible, the unknowable, and the absurd, and nothing but a vacuum remains” (Robert Green Ingersoll).

“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven” (Matthew 16:18).



± The American Church is in a general state of decline with fewer than 20% attending regularly. This suggests that 7.9 million people may be leaving the church yearly, or 150,000 each week.

According to research conducted by a Church Statistics Polling entity, Lifeway, the top two life-situations that prompt adults to stop attending church include being “too busy” (19%) and the burden of “family/home responsibilities” (17%). The next most common category or reasons involves disenchantment with pastor/church, which is 37% of the formerly churchd. Seventeen percent felt that church members were hypocritical. Another 17% felt they were being too heavily judged. And 12% felt that they were excluded from social cliques that prohibited them ever truly belonging.

± At St. James, we are deeply concerned by these numbers and reasons for leaving the church. Although we acknowledge our humanness, and that we are full of imperfections, we feel deeply called to rise above the harsh realities that are pulling the church down.

And so we ask you to join us. Join us in extending a warm invitation to those who have felt excluded or disillusioned. Of those formerly going to church 41% said they’d go back if someone genuinely invited them.

And beyond extending a warm welcome, we urge you also to join us in doing some soul searching. The Church is a *people*. How might we come closer to reflecting more truly the love of God and light of Christ that breaks through all barriers? See you Sept 13th!

## WORSHIP CALENDAR

± August 16  
“Three Widows—One Home”

± August 23  
“Romance in a Field”

± August 30  
“The Mother-in-Law”  
*Teacher Consecration Sunday*

± September 6  
“A Happy Marriage”

± September 13  
Back to Church Sunday:  
All-Church Celebration  
Afternoon Carnival & Prize Drawing  
Puppet Show  
Ice Cream Social

## **THE STORY OF RUTH — FAR**

Ruth is one of our favorite books in the Bible. It is one our favorites because Ruth is a story about ordinary people, going through the unexpected changes of life. In the story of Ruth we encounter a family dealing with daily issues of moving to a strange place where you know no one, struggling through tough economic times, problems of death and birth, looking for a life partner, and finally -- getting married to your soul mate. The story of Ruth has all of this and more. Throughout this story we witness God’s grace in the midst of difficult circumstances. Ruth’s story can be your story as well. Even in times of crisis and deepest despair, there are those who choose to follow God and through whom God works. God will use anyone who is open to him to achieve his purposes. As you experience this series be encouraged – God is at work in the world and he wants to use you! God could use you, as he used Naomi, to bring family and friends to him.

# THREE WIDOWS—ONE HOME

August 16

## ± The Scripture: Ruth 1:11-17

<sup>11</sup>...Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands?" <sup>12</sup> Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, <sup>13</sup> would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the LORD has turned against me." <sup>14</sup> Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. <sup>15</sup> So she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law." <sup>16</sup> But Ruth said, "Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. <sup>17</sup> Where you die, I will die-- there will I be buried. May the LORD do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!"

**± The Story:** The story of Ruth begins on a rather sad note with Naomi, Ruth's mother-in-law. Naomi loses her husband and both her sons in an instant, and she is left with only her daughters-in-law. Her first reaction is to do what any of us in our Western culture would think to do: she insisted that her daughters leave her so that she not be a burden to either of them. Independent and stubborn, we too often fear ever being a burden to another. Both Orpah and Ruth respond compassionately, insisting that they will not leave Naomi. Yet, as Naomi persists in her request, Orpah does choose to leave and make a new life. Ruth, however, does not. Possibly it is Ruth's character or upbringing that causes her to stay. There is mention that Ruth would return to other gods if she went home. It is possible she stayed because of God. Regardless, her fidelity to Naomi is rare and exceptional in this story!

*And the foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, all who keep the sabbath, and do not profane it, and hold fast my covenant--these I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples (Isaiah 56:6-7).*



## ± Closer to Home:

1. Throughout her difficult life Naomi continued to trust God. And God, in his time blessed her greatly. How can you follow Naomi's example and continue to trust God in your difficult times?
2. Ruth is more than just a nice story about a fortunate girl. It is the story of a person who was unaware of her larger purpose in life which was to be the direct ancestor of the ultimate redeemer. How can you remain faithful to God even when you can't see the whole picture of God's purpose for you?
3. What is God saying to you through this scripture?

# A HAPPY MARRIAGE

September 6

*Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the LORD your God is giving you (Exodus 20:12).*

## ± The Scripture: Ruth 4:13-17

<sup>13</sup>So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When they came together, the Lord made her conceive, and she bore a son. <sup>14</sup>Then the women said to Naomi, 'Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without next-of-kin; and may his name be renowned in Israel! <sup>15</sup>He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him.' <sup>16</sup>Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom, and became his nurse. <sup>17</sup>The women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, 'A son has been born to Naomi.' They named him Obed; he became the father of Jesse, the father of David.

**± The Story:** We remember that the purpose of the Book of Ruth is to portray domestic life during the period of the judges, to show how faith and dedication to the Lord is rewarded, and to show the lineage of the coming of the Messiah, the Lord Jesus Christ. When we read this story we become aware that the providence of God is at work. In this story God is in the process of bringing two believers together in marriage. If two people believe God is bringing them together for life and that he is leading them to link their lives together God will bless this union. Boaz and Ruth were true to God and to each other. Because of this they were a part of a royal lineage that included none other than their own Savior – Jesus Christ.



## ± Closer to Home:

1. We've all rejected another's offer for help. Why do we wish to be so independent? Why is it so difficult to receive the help of others at times?
2. There are times when we secretly rejoice when another turns our offer to help down because we didn't really want to help but knew it was the right thing to offer. How can we be more like Ruth and offer ourselves more selflessly and without regret?
3. Who in your life has shown you this same persistent willingness to help?

# ROMANCE IN A FIELD

August 23

*Though the Lord may give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself any more, but your eyes shall see your Teacher (Isaiah 30:20).*

## ± The Scripture: Ruth 2:5-11

Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, "To whom does this young woman belong?" <sup>6</sup> The servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, "She is the Moabite who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab." <sup>7</sup> She said, 'Please, let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the reapers.' So she came, and she has been on her feet from early this morning until now, without resting even for a moment." <sup>8</sup> Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Now listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women." <sup>9</sup> Keep your eyes on the field that is being reaped, and follow behind them. I have ordered the young men not to bother you. If you get thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn." <sup>10</sup> Then she fell prostrate, with her face to the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found favor in your sight, that you should take notice of me, when I am a foreigner?" <sup>11</sup> But Boaz answered her, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before."

± **The Story:** The text doesn't outright say why Boaz is so intently drawn to Ruth. It could be her young age and her beauty. It could be her state of humility or her work ethic. Perhaps he is struck with pity and respect for Ruth's valiant compassion toward Naomi. Although Boaz's and Ruth's eventual union is less than conventional, we are led to believe that Boaz's interest in Ruth, even in this first encounter, is more than sympathetic, and that this scene hints of romantic components. Regardless, faith plays a subtle, yet important role in this story, as virtues of service, loyalty, humility, reverence, and respect are all present in both characters, Boaz and Ruth.



## A Special Sunday for a Special Celebration

What is "Teacher Consecration?" Similar to when a Pastor consecrates the bread and wine during communion, the consecration of teachers is a recognition of each teacher that they have been called by God to serve as teachers. It is an act of calling on the Holy Spirit to bless each teacher and to confirm each teacher's response to God's call.

Performed by the laying on of the Pastor's and others' hands and by the act of communal prayer, each teacher is asked to come forward to receive the blessing.

We believe that this special act of consecration will bring strength to teachers when they are in need, direction when searching for ideas, confidence when the task seems daunting, and endless passion that comes with service and sharing the light of Christ with others.

# TEACHER CONSECRATION SUNDAY

August 30

## Thank You!

The church is comprised of gracious hearts and souls, willing to go the extra mile, to reach far beyond, to share and care.

To all teachers, guides, sages, and helpers at St. James and across the globe, we offer our heartfelt gratitude. You have laid down your lives to be living sacrifices and have offered your gifts to others as you have been called to give them. As a teacher, you are an essential member of the body of Christ. May God's grace be with you always!



*Speak to the people of Israel and say to them: When you enter the land that I am giving you and you reap its harvest, you shall bring the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest (Leviticus 23:10).*



## ± Closer to Home:

1. Ruth has some knowledge beforehand of whose field she is in, and there is no question of both people's attraction to each other. What role does God play in this part of the story?
2. We are left to ponder what exactly it was that Boaz found attractive about Ruth, and Ruth about Boaz. What characteristics do you or have you found to be most appealing in others, whether romantically or not?
3. Boaz showed great respect and honor to Ruth when they met. How might you go about developing friendships with those who portray similar good qualities?

# THE MOTHER-IN-LAW

August 30

*Wisdom cries out in the street; in the squares she raises her voice. At the busiest corner she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates she speaks... (Proverbs 1:20-21).*

## ± The Scripture: Ruth 3:1-6, 16-18

Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, 'My daughter, I need to seek some security for you, so that it may be well with you. <sup>2</sup>Now here is our kinsman Boaz, with whose young women you have been working. See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing-floor. <sup>3</sup>Now wash and anoint yourself, and put on your best clothes and go down to the threshing-floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. <sup>4</sup>When he lies down, observe the place where he lies; then, go and uncover his feet and lie down; and he will tell you what to do.' <sup>5</sup>She said to her, 'All that you tell me I will do.' <sup>6</sup>So she went down to the threshing-floor and did just as her mother-in-law had instructed her. <sup>7</sup><sup>16</sup>She came to her mother-in-law, who said, 'How did things go with you, my daughter?' Then she told her all that the man had done for her, <sup>17</sup>saying, 'He gave me these six measures of barley, for he said, "Do not go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed."' <sup>18</sup>She replied, 'Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out, for the man will not rest, but will settle the matter today.'



## ± Closer to Home:

1. Ruth listened to the older Naomi and followed her advice. Are you open to listening to the advice of those older and wiser than you?
2. Naomi had faith that Boaz was a man whose word could be trusted. Do others regard you as one who will do what you say?
3. How is this passage of scripture speaking to you today?