

Threads of Faithfulness: The Story of Ruth

Synod-wide Bible Study
with Dr. Michael Chan

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The Eastern North Dakota Synod, ELCA hosted this Bible Study in January 2025 with the intent of making the materials available to ministries across the synod for use in local settings.

Description:

The book of Ruth is a remarkable narrative of loyalty, resilience, and faithfulness. Due to tragic loss, Ruth lives on the edge of precarity. Her perilous and dangerous journey unfolds with courage and trust as she navigates life as a non-Israelite woman in a foreign land. Her steadfast love and loyalty testify to the power of relationships forged through hardship and perseverance. This study will explore how Ruth's story mirrors themes central to the Eastern North Dakota Synod's values: community, resilience, and relationships. Take time to delve into this profound story of hope, strength, and connection.

Presenter:

Dr. Michael Chan serves as the Vice President for Mission and Inclusion at Concordia College. Prior to that, he was associate professor of Old Testament at Luther Seminary in St. Paul, Minnesota. He joined Luther Seminary after completing his Ph.D. at Emory University and a year of research and teaching at the University of Helsinki. He is a graduate of Luther Seminary (M.A. in biblical theology) and Pacific Lutheran University (B.A. in elementary education).

Format:

This is a 4-session Bible Study. Each session focuses on one chapter in the book of Ruth. You should allow for 60-75 minutes per session.

Bible Study Layout:

- Opening Prayer
- Video Lesson (24-35 minutes)
- Discussion Questions
- Closing Prayer

Discussion Questions:

Session 1: Chapter 1

- What are you curious about in this text? What questions do you still have?
- In your view, what is the most important verse(s) in this chapter? Why?
- How does the theme of “chesed” (loyalty beyond what is required) show up in Chapter 1?
- Do you see your own community’s challenges, hopes, opportunities, etc reflected in this story?
- Chapter 1 is deeply relational. What insights into relationships do you gain from this chapter?
- Chapter 1 depicts women living in deeply precarious and fragile circumstances. Who are the precarious populations in your midst and how are your communities called to accompany them?

Session 2: Chapter 2

- What are you curious about in this text? What questions do you still have?
- In your view, what is the most important verse(s) in this chapter? Why?
- What from this text resonates with my community’s experiences?
- Are there Ruth’s in our midst?
- Are there ways that we could see ourselves being welcoming to the stranger or a person of deep procarity like Ruth?

Session 3: Chapter 3

- What are your first reactions to this chapter?
- What are you curious about in this text? What questions do you still have?
- In your view, what is the most important verse(s) in this chapter? Why?
- There is a Trinity of Vulnerability in the ancient world: Foreigners, Widows, and Orphans. Ruth fits into two of those categories.
 - When you think about your own local community (where your church is located), who belongs in that Trinity of Vulnerability? This is people whose lives are closest to the edge of disaster.
 - What are the markers of those who are vulnerable?

Session 4: Chapter 4

- What are you curious about in this text? What questions do you still have?
- In your view, what is the most important verse(s) in this chapter? Why?
- What did you learn about God from the story of Ruth?
- What could or does a story like this mean for our community?
 - It is a story of “loyalty beyond what is required,” or “chesed”.
- What are you wanting to take away from this story?
- How can you bring what you learned into our church community?