

The Decision to Stay

1. Warm up: We're in the midst of a sermon series on Bishop Mariann Edgar Budde's book, *How We Learn to Be Brave: Decisive Moments in Life and Faith*. A week ago Sunday, we explored her first chapter: *The Decision to Go – leaving one place, or way of being, to move toward another*. Although change can be scary, at least there's something exciting and romantic about making new beginnings, about packing our bags, waving goodbye to what is, and starting a fresh chapter in our life. We felt it even when we were kids. Growing up, most of us eagerly anticipated that day when we could leave home and step out into the great unknown, explore new territory, and make our mark on the world. When you were a kid, what did you dream you would someday become?
2. This week we're digging into something even scarier, and a lot less exciting, than going. The second chapter of Bishop Budde's book is about *The Decision to Stay – choosing to go deeper into existing commitments*. Although a decision to go can be scary, a decision to stay can be even more frightening and a lot less exciting. In fact, it can sometimes feel like downright drudgery. But decisions to stay can also be profoundly important. Our scripture passage for this week illustrates that. Read Ruth 1:6-18, as printed on p. 3.
 - a. All three of the women in our passage had suffered a devastating loss. Naomi lost her husband and two sons, and her daughters-in-law, Ruth and Naomi, lost their husbands. Think back to a time when you've experienced great loss in your family. What did that feel like to you? And what do you think the three women in our story were feeling?
 - b. The initial impulse of Ruth and Orpah was to stay with Naomi. But verse 8 tells us, "Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, 'Go back each of you to your mother's house. . . . The Lord grant that you may find security, each of you in the home of another husband.'" What does the initial impulse of Naomi's daughters-in-law to stay with her tell us about the nature of their relationship? And why do you think Naomi was so adamant that her daughters-in-law not stay with her?
 - c. What kind of future did Naomi face if she returned to Israel alone and widowed?
 - d. What kind of risks did Ruth face if she insisted on staying with Naomi? And why do you think she did it?
3. There's a Hebrew word for what Ruth did. It's arguably *the* most important word in the Old Testament. The word is *Khesed* (KHESS-ed). Ruth 3:10 uses that word to describe how Ruth related to Naomi. The same word is also used *dozens* of times in the Old Testament to describe how God relates to us. For example, Psalm 136:1 says, "O give thanks to the Lord, for God is good, for God's *khesed* endures forever." The *khesed* of God is referred to 26 more times in just that one chapter alone. *Khesed* means steadfast love. God's steadfast love for you endures forever. Which means there's nothing – absolutely nothing – that could ever separate you from the love of God. No matter what,

God will never leave or forsake you. No matter what, God will always – key word – *stay* with you. Just like Ruth did with Naomi.

- a. Are you, personally, at a place on your spiritual journey where you're able to genuinely feel how intensely God loves you? In other words, have you been able to internalize the depth of God's *khesed* for you? Why or why not?
 - b. What does Ruth's story teach us about how we should love the people around us?
 - c. Is it ever appropriate to depart from someone who's been close to you? If so, under what kind of circumstances?
4. Ruth's story is not just about the importance of staying with the people around us, but also staying in a certain place or situation when God calls us to do so, even though we might desperately want to go. In Psalm 55:6, the psalmist says, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest. Truly, I would flee far away." When in your life have you felt like that? What was going on? Did you ultimately stay or go?
5. Staying can be costly. It may require us to give up dreams we've had and cause us to feel trapped. So why would God ever call us to stay in a tough situation? On Sunday, Jeff suggested three reasons. Read through those reasons, as printed on p. 3, then discuss the questions below.
- a. Tell us about a time in your life when you decided to stay in a situation, even though it was really hard, and because you stayed **you feel you were able to have a deep impact** on a person or place. Are you glad you stayed? Why or why not?
 - b. Tell us about a time in your life when you decided to stay in a situation, even though it was really hard, and you feel like **you experienced a lot of self-growth** because of it. What did you learn and how did you grow? Are you glad you stayed? Why or why not?
 - c. Tell us about a time in your life when you decided to stay in a situation, even though it was really hard, and you feel like **you ended up experiencing some of life's greatest beauty**. What was the beauty you experienced? Are you glad you stayed? Why or why not?
 - d. There will be times in every one of our lives when we'll feel called to stay and other times we feel called to go. It's not like staying is always right and going is always wrong. So, suppose someone asked you, "How do we discern when to stay and when to go?" What would you say?
 - e. In your own life right now, do you feel God might be calling you to stay in a certain situation. If so, tell us about the situation and why you might be called to stay.

Ruth 1:6-18

6 Then Naomi started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD had had consideration for his people and given them food. ⁷So she set out from the place where she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to go back to the land of Judah. ⁸But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, 'Go back each of you to your mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. ⁹The LORD grant that you may find security, each of you in the home of another husband.' Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud. ¹⁰They said to her, 'No, we will return with you to your people.' ¹¹But 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? ¹²Turn 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, ¹³would 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.' ¹⁴Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

15 Naomi said, 'See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.' ¹⁶But 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. ¹⁷ Where you die, I will die—there will I be buried. May the LORD curse me and more as well, if even death parts me from you!' ¹⁸When Naomi saw that Ruth was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

Why Does God Often Call Us to Stay?

1. **Impact.** Staying is often when we're able to have the deepest impact on people or places, which, in turn, gives depth of meaning and significance to our lives.
2. **Soul Growth.** The challenges of staying are often what stretch, grow, and refine us into more glorious reflections of God's steadfast love, preparing us to partner with God throughout eternity.
3. **Beauty.** Surprisingly, our times of staying are often when we end up experiencing life's greatest beauty.