

Spring 2016 Bible Study and Sermon Series  
At  
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) of Decatur, Georgia

## “HEARTS UNBOUND”

Engaging Biblical Texts of God’s Radical Love  
Through Shared Readings, Conversations That Matter, and in Worship

Teacher and Preacher: Sr. Pastor James L. Brewer-Calvert

Continental Breakfast in Fellowship Hall, 9:00 – 9:30 AM

Bible Study in Church Parlor, 9:30 – 10:15 AM

Worship in Sanctuary, 10:30 AM

April 17	The Book of Ruth
April 24	The Book of Jonah
May 1	Jesus and the Sabbath
May 8	Jesus and the Canaanite Woman
May 15	The Parable of the Good Samaritan
May 22	Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch
May 29	Peter and Cornelius
June 5	The Gentiles and the Council of Jerusalem
June 12	Paul’s Argument for Extravagant Welcome
June 19	The Tale of Sodom and Gomorrah

### Sermon

#### *“Hearts Unbound”*

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia  
Season of Eastertide, Sunday, April 17, 2016  
James L. Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

Ruth 1: 1-18; 3: 1-5; 4: 13-17

#### **Ruth 1: 1-18**

In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and two sons. <sup>2</sup> The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion; they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. <sup>3</sup> But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. <sup>4</sup> These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. When they had lived there about ten years, <sup>5</sup> both Mahlon and Chilion also died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband. <sup>6</sup> Then she 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 considered his people and given them food. <sup>7</sup> So 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.

<sup>8</sup> But 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. <sup>9</sup> The Lord grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband." Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud. <sup>10</sup> They said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people." <sup>11</sup> But 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!" <sup>18</sup> When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

### **Ruth 3: 1-5 -- *Ruth and Boaz at the Threshing Floor***

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."

### **Ruth 4: 13-17 -- *The Genealogy of David***

<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.

## **Hearts Unbound**

Are you like me,  
    knowing full well what it is like to have a heart bound  
and tied and constricted?

See if any of this applies or describes or decries  
    what you’ve been through on your journey.

A bound heart is one that sets limits on love,  
    draws lines in the sand,  
        says I’ll go this far and no further.

A bound heart builds protective borders and walls,  
    deep chasms and moats,  
        pulls up the drawbridge after going across.

A bound heart insists on conditions for love,  
    and then determines the conditions.

A bound heart succumbs to fears and qualms, anxieties and  
worries.

A bound heart is constricted, tightly wrapped, tied up,  
clenched like a fist.

A bound heart believes wholeheartedly in scarcity, in the lack  
of enough.

A bound heart struggles to give way and make space for any  
more,

    more love, more people, more imagination, more  
forgiveness.

Two children were squabbling and one demanded to be

forgiven, saying,  
*“You have to forgive me because Jesus said for you to  
forgive me,  
and not just seven times but seventy times seven.”*  
*“Okay, I’ll forgive you 490 times,”* said the other, *“but after  
that you are in trouble.”*

Even if a bound heart is not fully cognizant that liberation is  
possible  
--that Jesus’ love can resurrect the broken and bound-

-  
a bound heart intuitively, inherently,  
instinctively craves  
to be freed, set loose, liberated,  
sanctified by the grace of God.

## **Hearts Unbound**

In 1983, North Carolina State were underdogs  
in the NCAA basketball tournament championship  
against Houston,  
known as Phi Slama Jama,  
featuring seven footers Ralph Sampson  
and Hakeem Olajuwon.

Miracle of miracles, NC State won on a last second shot  
(sound familiar, ‘Nova?').

The team and fans and coaches exploded in pure,  
unadulterated joy.

In the moments that followed

Coach Jimmy Vilvano ran around the court looking  
for someone to hug.

Jimmy V’s heart was unbound;

he had to share his joy, his love, his happiness with  
someone, anyone, everyone.

When the love of Jesus unbinds your heart and sets you free

to be, to love, to live,  
    we have to share this joy, this love, this happiness  
        with someone, anyone, everyone.  
Unbound hearts express themselves in the joyful practice of  
sharing.  
An unbound heart,  
    rather than being constricted by the mythology of  
scarcity,  
        resonates in the concept of enough.  
Not only is there enough, there is always enough because  
“the Lord will provide.”  
Here there is enough, and to spare.  
Enough room, enough love, enough grace, enough space for  
one and all.

Recently a group of Christian college students from Virginia  
Tech and VCU  
    came to Decatur to do community service projects  
while on Spring Break.  
They did a number of projects in our physical plant,  
including painting the youth room.  
A 20 year old was reflecting on his personal faith formation  
and the role of the Church.  
He said, *“If Christians really believed in God  
there would be no need for welfare  
because everyone would have enough and to spare.”*  
His heart is unbound.  
This 20 year old in our midst embraces the connections  
between faith and practice,  
    between love and hospitality, between sacrifice and  
generosity,  
        between God’s Word and our Social  
Responsibility.

## **Hearts Unbound**

An unbound heart is naturally drawn toward the practice of hospitality.

Hearts unbound from social restrictions and expectations and limitations

overflow with loving, hospitable intentions and invitations.

In the Book of Ruth we overhear the story of Elimelech and Naomi,

both from Bethlehem in Judah.

This story happened around 3,000 years ago, when judges ruled the land.

This story is a narrative response

to a prevailing attitude in early Hebrew communities,

an attitude of exclusivity,

that foreigners were dangerous and

resources scarce.

This story is also a blessed reminder to the same Hebrew followers of God

that just when things seem hopeless, the Lord provides.

Early Hebrew storytellers who drafted the Book of Ruth

wanted folks to know that the Lord's nature is to nurture.

When God's people behave likewise,

they discover the unbound generosity of God's resources.

You see, a thousand years before Mary and Joseph travelled to Bethlehem,

Elimelech and Naomi left Bethlehem because of a famine.

These refugees travelled far from home to go to the country of Moab.

There they had two sons, Mahlon and Chilion,  
and there they made a living and a home.  
They grieved when Elimelech passed away,  
yet life goes on and so did they.  
Mahlon and Chilion married local women named Orpah and Ruth.  
Then Mahlon and Chilion died.  
Bereft in her loss, widowed and childless,  
Naomi decided to leave Moab, to return to the land of her ancestors,  
and so she said good-bye to her daughters in law from Moab.  
Surely, she must have thought, they would rather be with their own than with her.  
Orpah turned to go back to her family, but Ruth clung to Naomi.  
The Lord provided for Naomi an amazing daughter in law.  
One might say that Ruth's heart was unbound by God's grace,  
that her compassion and caring and concern for Naomi overcame whatever fears and qualms, anxieties and worries she may have had.

*"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.*

*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!"*

*When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.*

## **Hearts Unbound**

Had the people of the country of Moab

not practiced hospitality toward Elimelech and

Naomi,

the purposes of God would have been thwarted.

Had Ruth not practiced such love and loyalty toward Naomi,

the purposes of God would have been thwarted.

And now we see how Boaz, given an opportunity,  
enables the purposes of God to come to fruition.

Now back home in the land of Judah,  
Naomi encouraged Ruth to go to Boaz,  
to find him on the threshing floor,  
to unbind “his feet” and unbind his  
heart.

Boaz claimed Ruth as his wife, and they had a son.  
Naomi held her grandson and rejoiced in this gift of love and  
life.

*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.*

God set loose the hearts of the Moabites,  
and they in turn welcomed a Jewish couple from  
Bethlehem in Judah.  
God unbound Ruth’s heart to practice love and loyalty,  
so she redeemed a broken soul named Naomi.  
God through Naomi brought together Ruth and Boaz,  
binding their hearts as one,  
so these foreign souls that were at one time foreign to  
each other  
produced a life that would beget the lineage  
from King David all the way to Jesus of  
Nazareth,  
who would be born in Bethlehem  
in Judah.

“God works in the most unusual, unexpected, and benevolent  
ways!”[\[1\]](#)

See what God can do when followers unbind their hearts and



hearths?

## **Hearts Unbound**

Ever hear of Will Campbell?

He was a Baptist preacher with a passion for civil rights and human rights

for the last, the least and the lost.

One day he was convicted by the Gospel

to bring Jesus' love to adamant racists and hardscrabble folks.

*"He [continued] the civil rights movement*

*[by] ministering to white supremacists,*

*sharing God's love and hope*

*to the very people he had been fighting against."*[\[2\]](#)

If you've ever read the cartoon Kudzu,

Will Campbell was the inspiration for the preacher Will B. Done.

Anyway, Will Campbell described his fantasy for an altar call.

He imagined that at the end of worship

the preacher invites people to meet Jesus.

As the people begin to come down the aisle, the preacher shouts to them,

*"Why are you coming to me? Go out and find Jesus!"*

Their hearts are unbound.

They are set free and liberated to go forth, to practice love and loyalty,

to overcome their fears and qualms,

to practice hospitality in the community,

to open themselves to the flow of the

Spirit.

And they turn and head out of the church building to find Jesus,

to make Him welcome, to make Him known, to make His love incarnate in them.

In a little while, news reports begin coming in.  
The jails are being swamped with people wanting to visit the prisoners.  
The nursing homes are overwhelmed  
    with people coming to share God's love with the patients.  
The cupboards in the food pantries in town  
    don't have room to store all the food they've received.  
And in every one of those places, people are yelling,  
*"We want to see Jesus. We want to see Jesus."*

### **Hearts Unbound**

That's the invitation God offers:  
    Unbind your heart and seek Jesus in the face of your neighbor in need.  
How do we do that?  
That's the real issue, isn't it?  
How do we do that?  
Maybe, just maybe, you already are.

I look around the church and our city,  
    and I realize that we're already doing and being and sharing a great deal.  
Many of you ... perhaps even most of you ...  
    are already reaching out to serve and to care and to have compassion  
    ... to feed the hungry and clothe the naked and welcome the stranger.  
Many of you ... perhaps most of you ...  
    already know the joy of meeting Jesus in the face of people in need.  
You deliver a meal to a family going through a tough time.  
You sit with a friend grieving the loss of a loved one.  
You spend a few hours at Hagar's House serving homeless families.

You stop and offer a word of encouragement to a discouraged coworker.

You've experienced inner joy and a burning heart  
when sharing the Good News of God's love.

I like to imagine that it was a follower of Jesus, maybe one of us here today,  
who is the mysterious angel of grace in Decatur.

Recently a woman was interviewed for Story Corps;  
her tale was aired on the radio.

She told about coming to America from a land near to the country of Moab.

She was sitting all alone in the Decatur City Square,  
feeling lonely and isolated and homesick.

She was dressed in her traditional garb from her homeland,  
breathing in the air of a new land,  
a land new to her,  
a land that did not feel like home.

A native of Decatur walked nearby, stopped,  
looked her in the eyes, and said, "*Welcome home!*"

She said that she felt so good she wept with joy.

And then she went and got a job that became her vocation.  
She helps new immigrants to this land  
get situated and to be made welcome.

Story Corps ended by mentioning that  
she has been doing this vocation for 18 years now.  
Imagine her lineage of grace, a lineage that fulfills the purpose of God.

See what God can do when followers of Jesus unbind their hearts!

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!*

### Communion Invitation[\[3\]](#)

“When we come to the Lord’s Table,  
we are meant to see the bigger picture of God’s love  
and sacrifice.

This meal represents a welcome table  
that is set for all who confess that Jesus is Lord and  
Savior.

It is also set for those who want to meet Jesus,  
even for the first time,  
and discover for themselves the goodness of  
God.

Jesus invites us all in, saints and sinners alike,  
and then uses this meal to bring us together.

Our Savior doesn’t worry about the little details of our life.

Jesus is concerned about the bigger matters,  
like forgiveness and salvation, like reconciliation and  
redemption,

like being love and sharing grace upon grace,  
that are offered in this Bread of Life and Cup of the  
New Covenant.”

The Table is set. Come to the feast, and know that the Lord  
is God.

[\[1\]](#) Walter Brueggemann, Texts for Preaching, Year B. Westminster/Knox Press.  
1993. P. 578.

[2] Karen Mains, Open Heart, Open Home, (Elgin, IL: Cook, 1976)

3 Paraphrased from Jason Gottman, The Journal of Worship Resources, Pentecost II, 2008 Issue, p. 23.