

In Naomi's life there were massive changes taking place: the death of her husband and sons, she and Ruth move back to her home country. Naomi could have easily resigned herself to live the life of a widow. Gleaning and scratching out an existence. Boaz was being kind to her and Ruth and they likely would have experienced that generosity for as long as Boaz lived. Naomi could have also raged against the changes. But instead she teaches and she loves.

To learn about Naomi's genius it is helpful to look at Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750). Early in his career, he was the greatest innovator in music. He was known all over Europe for his creativity with High Baroque. Then twenty years before his death something happened. The High Baroque went out of style. About 1730 the Classical period swept Europe—High Baroque became like disco—no one wanted to listen to it. In fact, one of the most famous composers of the Classical Era was Johann Christian Bach, his son, and he was eclipsing his father. So what did Bach Sr. do? Did he rage against the change? Did he give up? No, he began to teach. He believed that there was intrinsic value in learning and mastering the High Baroque. The last 20 years of his life he dedicated to teaching and he worked on *The Art of Fugue* (Die Kunst der Fuge). It was a textbook that he died while working on—literally he was writing mid-measure it stopped. His son wrote in the margins, "At this point my father put down his pen and died." Bach died doing what he loved. Let's listen to the last 60 sec.

Not bad. What can we learn from Bach's story about Naomi and for ourselves? Bach started out using what social psychologists call fluid intelligence. This is mental horsepower. This is processing speed and RAM combined. Fluid

intelligence is our Sherlock Holm's brain. Bach was innovating and creating like mad for the first 20 years of his career but as the High Baroque was going out of style he switched to use more of what social psychologists call crystallized intelligence, wisdom. Crystallized intelligence is our Dali Llama brain. Fluid intelligence begins to decrease at a certain age but crystallized intelligence increases with age. Example: Poets are all fluid intelligence. Historians crystallized intelligence. Poets have done half of the corpus of their work by 40, historians not until age 65. You have to know a lot and read a lot to be a historian. The secret is when you are young rely on your fluid intelligence and as you age move and begin to rely on your crystallized intelligence—wisdom. Become a teacher. With crystallized intelligence you can explain things with clarity and answer any question. That is what Naomi did. That is what Bach did.

100 years after Bach's death Felix Mendelssohn dusted off Bach's works, played them for his friends and it is then that Bach became known as the greatest composer that ever lived. Why? Because he taught. He shared his wisdom, but there is something else too.

The blank canvas is often a mediator for life. We have a blank canvas and we must add to it to make our life. More experiences and relationship and creation. But in Eastern art the stone bolder is the metaphor. The art is in there, art is the process of revealing, of taking away to reveal the true art. In our early lives we must add to the canvas but as we age we must become more like eastern art and take away, to more fully reveal our truest selves. We need to stop doing the things that aren't fully us. For many of us saying "no" is hard, but saying, "no" to good things in our lives, allows us to say, "yes" to the things that make lives great. Naomi could have whirled around

making a fuss and worrying about her life but she sat and breathed deeply and she mentored Ruth and instructed Ruth. She was like Bach or rather he was like Naomi. They peeled away to reveal their truest selves.

Peace Lutheran Church is forty; I'm not saying middle-age because organizations *can* live much longer than humans. What can we, Peace Lutheran Church, learn from Naomi? The power of focus. The discipline to pursue the things that are most us. In the last year Peace has clarified its focus: welcome, worship and service. These three things have always been at the core of our being as an organization and they continue to guide our ministry. Peace Lutheran Church is becoming our truest selves that God is creating us to be.

So far we've been looking through the lens of individuals: Naomi, Bach and Peace Lutheran as an individual congregation. We have looked at this as if we are trees, lone solitary trees, self sufficient like this aspen. We don't need anything or anyone else. Like Psalm 1—trees planted by streams yielding fruit to prosper— you do it on your own. This metaphor is very deceptive—we don't live in isolation. When you are asked, "Who are you?" don't tell what you do or did for a living, tell about the love in your life. Let me give you a minor biology lesson. What is the largest organism in the history of the world?

This is the largest living organism, it is a stand of Aspen trees in Utah. It is known as Pando, 106 acres, 6000 tons. It is one plant. The aspen tree has one set of roots. It looks like an individual tree but it is not; it is a sprout from the same roots. It is the same tree. When you see an aspen tree you are seeing one part of the plant. This is the proper metaphor for our lives. We

are not a single tree we are an aspen grove. We are not our individual achievements we are the sum of our roots—we are our relationship, we are the love that supports and nurtures us. This is what we learn from Naomi and from Ruth. Love and community are our highest achievements and the greatest predictors of happiness.

As I look back on the four years of my ministry here at Peace Lutheran Church and as we reflect on the 40 years of Peace Lutheran's ministries in this location, rooted in and supported by the past I feel my vision turned toward the future. Naomi's witness guiding us, saying, "Don't rage against change. Stick closely to the parts of you that are most fully you (welcome, worship and service). And surround yourselves with love. Amen.