

In our entertainment-saturated world, we hear a lot of lines from movies. Most are quickly forgotten, but some can still make us laugh, some can make us think, and others can still bring tears to our eyes when we hear them. But among the countless lines that have been captured on film, a few have actually changed the way we talk.

In *The Wizard of Oz*, released back in 1939, Dorothy says to her dog, “Toto, I’ve a feeling we’re not in Kansas anymore.” And ever since people often quote that line whenever they feel like the world around them has changed. In 1967, the movie *Cold Hand Luke* gave us the words, “What we’ve got here is a failure to communicate.” We typically hear someone quote that line if they are feeling like they are suffering from a complete breakdown in communication with others. And who can forget Will Ferrell’s comedic brilliance in the movie *Zoolander*, when he declared, “I feel like I’m taking crazy pills,” which easily describes how so many people are feeling these days!

Of course, the world of Hollywood, is not the only source where we can find lines that shape our lives. One can easily argue that the Bible is also full of great phrases that are remembered and quoted in a variety of situations. Psalm 23 gives us the comforting verse, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.” The prophet Jeremiah offers us words from God to live by, “For surely I know the plans I have for you, says the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.” First Corinthians provides newly married couples, and all followers of Jesus’ command to love others with the popular insight, “Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude.” And, of course, there is the verse that Martin Luther called “the Gospel in miniature,” John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.”

Another classic comes from our text this evening in the book of Ruth: “Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God.” This passages from scripture, along with countless others can bring meaning to our lives, because they capture an important insight about the nature of God and human beings. They reveal to us that the Lord is as caring and protective toward us as a shepherd is toward his sheep. That God really does watch over us, making plans for our welfare. That Christ truly does strengthen us to face the challenges of our lives, and that all things do tend to work together for good when we love and serve our gracious Lord.

These biblical verses are concise summaries of bigger truths, in the same way that movie lines reveal something essential about their characters. But great lines also shape us because they capture an entire story. When Dorothy says, “We’re not in Kansas anymore,” you know that she has entered the strange new world of Oz. When Will Ferrell shouts, “I feel like I’m taking crazy pills,” you are getting a shorthand description of the entire *Zoolander* movie, in which two male models try to prevent the murder of a prime minister at a fashion show.

In the book of Ruth, we hear Ruth saying the line, “Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God.” This line has the capacity to shape our lives, because it captures the entire story of the book of Ruth, bringing to mind the faithfulness of Ruth to her mother-in-law Naomi which, in turn, is a picture of God’s faithfulness to us. Her comment mirrors God’s faithfulness, it reminds us of Christ’s promise to never leave us or forsake us.

But what was it that led-up to this memorable line anyway? Back in the days when judges ruled the people of Judah, there was a famine in the land. A man of Bethlehem fled the famine and went to live in the land of Moab, along with his wife Naomi and two sons. The man died in Moab, and his two sons married a

couple of Moabite women named Orpah and Ruth. But then the two sons died, leaving Naomi without a husband or sons. She was living at a time in which life was hard, brutal, and short.

So what was poor Naomi supposed to do? She decided to return to Judah, where the famine was now over. But she knew that she had nothing to offer her daughters-in-law, so she said, “Go back each of you to your mother’s house. May the Lord deal kindly with you.” Naomi loved her daughters-in-law, but she knew that she could not give them additional husbands. In a line that is really quite humorous, Naomi asks, “Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? [Even] if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, would you then wait until they were grown?”

All three weep, and then Orpah kisses Naomi and heads back to Moab. She leaves reluctantly, not with a brush-off or an “I’ll be back,” like the line from the 1984 movie the Terminator. That’s a good-bye that has become quite popular in other movies, and as a cheesy goodbye for movie lovers. So Orpah leaves Naomi, but Ruth clings to her even when Naomi also encourages her to return home. Ruth says to Naomi, “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.” When Naomi sees that Ruth is faithful to her and determined to stay with both her and her God, Naomi allows her to come along.

This memorable verse captures the story of Ruth’s faithfulness. The line is repeated in a variety of settings today, with the citation of “Ruth 1:16” appearing inside wedding rings and on tabletop photo frames. These words of Ruth, expressing her determination to be faithful to Naomi and to God, have actually shaped our lives and have changed the way we talk and feel.

We remember these words because they reveal something essential about Ruth: She was a woman of deep love and faithfulness. But we also remember these

words because they summarize the entire story of a book named after her, and remind us that God used this loving and faithful woman in a powerful way. Ruth went to Bethlehem with Naomi, and there she met a man named Boaz. She married him and had a son who became the grandfather of David. Because Ruth remained faithful to Naomi and to God, she was able to become the ancestor of the greatest of Israel's kings — and of Jesus.

Let's not assume, however, that love and faithfulness can always lead to a perfect Hollywood ending. When Ruth promises to stay with Naomi, she does not know that she will end up with a husband and child. Jessica Tate, the director of the organization called NEXT Church, reminds us that when the two women arrive in Bethlehem, Naomi is bitter and empty. "At this point in the story," she says, "we do not know that Ruth will become Naomi's savior." We do not know that there will be a new family or plentiful food. All we are left with is Naomi's emptiness.

"This is where we so often find ourselves," says Tate, "with a scary diagnosis, a relationship crumbling, the loss of a job, the death of a loved one. We find ourselves in these empty places, uncertain of the end of the story. We do not know how, or if, our fortunes, our security, our confidence, our hope will be restored."

So what are we to do? In the 2001 movie *A Beautiful Mind*, a brilliant mathematician named John Nash suffers from terrible hallucinations. After a particularly threatening episode, his wife Alicia comes to him and asks, "You want to know what's real?" Putting his hand on her heart, she says, "This is real." She remains faithful to him in the face of an uncertain future, and near the end of his life, he wins the Nobel Prize.

"This is real," says Alicia Nash — you are not alone. "This is real," says Ruth to Naomi — I will be with you, I won't leave you or abandon you. In other words, we are left with a simple but powerful promise that we are not alone. And

that is God's promise to us, through Christ as well — that nothing in all creation will separate us from our Lord.

“Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge.” This promise from Ruth to Naomi is also God's promise to each of us. “You want to know what's real?” *This* is real — the love and faithfulness of the one true God, in every time and place, in the face of any hardship, loss or failure. Our loving Heavenly father promise to always be with us. And that's a line that can, and should, shape our lives of faith. Amen.