

On the pages  
Stories of love and rages  
Art to heart

The Bible can be a difficult book to comprehend. It contains stories that seem the polar opposites of each other. The Book of Judges ends with a horrendous story of a concubine being raped and then mutilated. Her death and mutilation become the reason for attacking the tribe of Benjamin. The bitter pill in the story is that the owner threw the concubine to the wolves so that he wouldn't be attacked. It is a harsh reminder that women were too often seen as disposable property by the ancients.

The Book of Ruth follows this story. In it, we have the story of two women who are courageous and faithful. Their story is the story of women who are treated humanely, and are seen as persons, not property. The Law forbade the marrying of a Hebrew to a Moabite. Yet, through the Moabite Ruth, Jesus is born.

These stories are stunningly different. How do we make sense of them?

Brian McClaren, in his book, *We Make The Way By Walking*, lifts us three important things that help us read the Bible. They are Science, Art and Heart. Science is helpful in knowing the context and culture of the Scripture. We don't use Science as a way to judge Scripture, but to help us understand what life was like. In the story of Judges, Science informs us about the role of women in the culture of the Judges. It also helps us to see the radical difference between these stories. Ruth's story of grace is in great contrast to the story of Judges.

Art is taking notice that the Bible is a literary and therefore artistic book. We need an artist eye and ear as we listen to these stories. These stories don't seek as much, as McClaren states, to give us information as create formation. They seek to shape us, and they do this by engaging our imagination. Poetry, prose, songs and stories make up the Scriptures. The art of placing these two stories about women back to back is something we notice through our artistic approach. We are drawn into one with rage and into the other with grace and mercy. Can we imagine a different way than the way of violence?

Finally, it takes heart. We are called to approach Scripture with "*humble, teachable heart* that listens for the voice of the Spirit." If we come to Scripture thinking we already know the answer, we probably won't gain much. It's when we come with our hearts open, asking God to fill us, that we will encounter the work of the Spirit. When our heart is open to being transformed, transformation will occur.

Pastor Parnell

(These thoughts are inspired by Brian McClaren's book, *We Make The Road By Walking*.)