

Not my people

By [James Sledge](#)

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"May I continue to find favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your

servant, even though I am not one of your servants." If you knew that these words were from the Bible, but did not know the context, what would you suppose they meant? In the Old Testament, Israel is often spoken of as God's servant. In the Greek of the New Testament, the same word is sometimes translated "servant," other times "slave." Paul writes of being a slave to sin, and Jesus speaks of a servant not being greater than the master. Many of these uses speak metaphorically about relationship.

And

so I think it would be reasonable to hear the opening sentence of this blog and presume it to be the words of an outsider, a Gentile perhaps, acknowledging God's grace and asking that it continue even though this outsider is not one of God's people.

I

love to tell a story about my grandmother-in-law, a wonderful lady who was 95 when she drove herself to the doctor with "the flu," which turned out to be the heart failure that ended her life days later. One time when I had replaced the filter on her furnace (a complicated procedure that required measuring and cutting filter material from a roll and fitting it onto a cage-like structure that went in the furnace), she wanted to pay me. I objected but she insisted. When my wife also objected, she said that she had to pay me because, "He's not my people."

It

was her way of saying I wasn't a blood relative, and as such I didn't have quite the same obligations toward her. Not being "her people," I wasn't required to help her, but since I had, she felt required to pay me. Strange as it might seem, by not being "her people," I had it better than those who were. She treated me no differently from her biological grandchildren. In fact her statement, "He's not my people,"

was so funny to all of us because there was nothing in her behavior toward me to bear it out. And so the only difference between me and those who were "her people" was that I got paid and they didn't.

"May I continue to find favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your

servant, even though I am not one of your servants." These are Ruth's words to Boaz after his kind treatment of her, kind treatment motivated by Ruth's loyalty to Naomi, and in spite of the fact that Ruth is "not his people."

For

most of modern history, Western Christians have tended to understand the faith along sharply drawn lines of "us and them." But it is not clear to me whether these dividing lines are rooted in God's character or in our own. And if the story of Ruth is to be read at all metaphorically, God's character seems not unlike that of my grandmother-in-law when it comes to those outside the family.

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