Ruth 1:1, 3-6, 14b-16, 22
Psalm 146 (sung)
Matthew 22:34-40

"But in this place of which you say it is a waste, there will be heard again the voice of mirth and the voice of gladness ... the voices of those who sing" (Jeremiah 33:11; quoted by Greg Boyle, S.J., *Tattoos on the Heart*, 212).

"The wrong idea has taken root in the world. And the idea is this: there just might be lives out there that matter less than other lives" (Boyle, 192). Who is in danger? Who is being left behind? Who is beaten and murdered? Who is our neighbor?

Can you imagine the fear of a widow who has also lost her children, the sons she and her culture expected to care for, feed her, protect her? Such is Ruth's plight in today's reading from the Book of Ruth. We hear the story of two women, Ruth and Naomi, of different generations who understand their need for kinship; they are strangers in a strange land; they are in mortal danger from tribalism; the notion that if you don't look like me, act like me, agree with me, then you are less than human. Today we more often call "tribalism" but other names such as racism, ethnocentrism, and bigotry. Between Naomi and Ruth, a kinship, like the kinship Father Greg Boyle writes about in *Tattoos on the Heart*, grows for these women. The elder, Naomi, has treated the younger, Ruth with dignity and motherly love. Ruth, as a result, does not abandon her mother-in-law.

"Kinship - not serving the other, but being one with the other. Jesus was not 'a man/or others'; he was one with them," he was for and with others. "There is a world of difference in that" (Boyle, 188).

As happens many times in his public life, Jesus encounters those who hope to trip him up, to catch him in error. The lawyer's cynical question about the greatest commandment is but another attempt to do this. Instead of falling for the trap, Jesus quotes the Book of Deuteronomy, a text none of his hearers can argue against:
"You shall love the Lord your God
   With your whole heart,
   With your whole soul, and
   With your whole mind"

Right answer, Jesus! But then Jesus goes on and really screws everything up:

"This is the greatest and the first commandment. The second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" So, who is my neighbor?

The point is that love of God without love of neighbor is only a refined self-absorption, a kind of narcissism, a social contract for self-preservation. This is not the kinship we are called to. This is not the kinship we strive for in the Regis community.

Father Boyle asks Willy, a gang member in LA, toward the end of the first chapter of Tattoos,

"How does God see you?"

Willy doesn't answer at first. So I turn and watch as he rests his head on the recliner, staring at the ceiling of my car. A tear runs down his cheek. Heart full, eyes overflowing, he says, "God ... thinks I'm ... firme."

To the homies, firme means, "could not be one bit better."

Do you believe that you are exactly, precisely the person God wanted to create, exactly as you are? We all strive to be better, that is, our best selves. But if you do not believe that about yourself, how can you believe that about your neighbor?