

Ruth 2:14-23
God's Hand in Our Blessing
WRCoB 6.21.20

Two Sundays ago

We began a sermon series on the Book of Ruth.

We followed Naomi, her husband, Elimelech

And their two sons, Mahlon and Kilion

From Israel to Moab because of a famine.

In Moab, Elimelech dies leaving Naomi a widow.

Her two sons, married Moabite women.

After ten years and no grandchildren they also die

Leaving Naomi and her two daughters-in-law

Ruth and Orpah.

Hearing that the famine was over

Naomi returns to Judah

And to her village, Bethlehem.

Her daughter-in-law, Ruth, accompanies her

Refusing to leave her with these endearing words.

“Don't ask me to leave you because I won't.

Where you go, I will go,

Where you stay I will stay,

Your God will be my God,

And where you die, I will die there too.”

We left them at the gates of Bethlehem,
Two widows, a mother and her daughter-in-law

Suffering tremendous loss, facing a precarious future
And wondering where God was in all of it.

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Last Sunday, Ruth asks her mother-in-law
If she could go out and glean behind the harvesters
So that they might get something to eat.

Naomi, despondent in grief allows her to go.

And “as luck would have it”
Ruth found herself gleaning in the field
Of a wealthy and influential man.

His name was Boaz,
Who was also, by “coincidence” a relative
Of Naomi’s husband Elimelech.

Boaz takes an interest in Ruth
And sees to it that she is taken care of.

We find them still in the field of barley.

14 At lunchtime Boaz called to her, "Come over here and help yourself to some of our food. You can dip your bread in the wine if you like." So she sat with his harvesters, and Boaz gave her food -- more than she could eat. 15 When Ruth went back to work again, Boaz ordered his young men, "Let her gather grain right among the sheaves without stopping her. 16 And pull

out some heads of barley from the bundles and drop them on purpose for her. Let her pick them up, and don't give her a hard time!"

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Boaz is not only a man of wealth and influence  
But a kindhearted and decent man.

We saw his decency as he approached his workers  
And we see his compassion toward Ruth.

He had heard of Ruth's character  
Of how she stood by her mother-in-law  
Forsaking a future of her own  
For a life of devotion to Naomi.

This deeply impressed the people of Bethlehem  
And word spread of this "foreigner's" love and devotion.

Boaz goes out of his way  
Not only allowing Ruth to glean his fields  
As any devout Jew is required to do

But he invites Ruth to join them for lunch  
And invites her to dip her bread in the common bowl.

Remarkable, considering the fact that Ruth was a Moabite!

This invitation stretched the limits of hospitality for Jews  
And probably caused some serious grumbling  
Among the workers.

You just don't share a common bowl with foreigners!

And if that isn't enough, following lunch  
He orders his workers to be intentionally sloppy  
When harvesting

So that Ruth could gather more grain  
Than she could have otherwise.

Boaz tells the men to go easy on Ruth  
Knowing they are none too happy with his orders.

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**17 So Ruth gathered barley there all day, and when she beat out the grain that evening, it came to about half a bushel. 18 She carried it back into town and showed it to her mother-in-law. Ruth also gave her the food that was left over from her lunch. 19a "So much!" Naomi exclaimed. "Where did you gather all this grain today? Where did you work? May the LORD bless the one who helped you!"**

At this point in the story  
WE know that Boaz  
Is both wealthy and influential  
AND a relative of Naomi's husband.

Ruth only knows his name.  
Naomi knows nothing.

But she is quite struck by Ruth's "good fortune".

She comes out of her grief-stricken depression.

She says something more than she has said in a long while.

“Wow!” Would you look at that.”

“Where in the world did you get this much grain?”

“Whose field did you glean?”

And then, for the first time since she blamed God  
For being the cause of her suffering

She now blesses this man for looking out for Ruth.

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19b So Ruth told her mother-in-law about the man in whose field she had worked. And she said, "The man I worked with today is named Boaz." 20 "May the LORD bless him!" Naomi told her daughter-in-law. "He is showing his kindness to us as well as to your dead husband. That man is one of our closest relatives, one of our family redeemers." 21 Then Ruth said, "What's more, Boaz even told me to come back and stay with his harvesters until the entire harvest is completed." 22 "This is wonderful!" Naomi exclaimed. "Do as he said. Stay with his workers right through the whole harvest. You will be safe there, unlike in other fields."

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Boaz! What a lucky break!

Naomi has come back from the dead.  
Her grieving is over.

She sees a glimmer of hope rising above her suffering.

God has heard their cries in the night  
And is aware of their suffering  
And has taken compassion on them.

Naomi, in her new found hope and excitement  
Instructs Ruth to do as Boaz says  
Stick close to him no matter what.

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23 So Ruth worked alongside the women in Boaz's fields and gathered grain with them until the end of the barley harvest. Then she worked with them through the wheat harvest, too. But all the while she lived with her mother-in-law.

A new chapter has dawned on Naomi and Ruth.

There is new hope and purpose for living.
God has not forsaken them.

Ruth rises with the sun
And follows the harvesters from field to field
Through the barley harvest and the wheat harvest.

God prospers the work of Ruth's hands.

God blesses them through the kindness of Boaz.

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The story of Ruth is a story of an ordinary family
That has fallen "down on their luck."

Two single, widowed women leave Moab for Bethlehem.

Naomi returns home empty and broken.

Her foreign-born, daughter-in-law, Ruth, follows her.

Naomi, caught up in her grief
Renames herself “Mara” meaning bitterness.

She has lost her husband
She has lost her two sons
She has no grandchildren

The only thing she has left is the Moabite girl
Who clings to her mother-in-law
With tremendous love and devotion.

Naomi, holes up in her apartment
Leaves the curtains closed
Sleeps till noon
Watches too much TV
And drinks more than she should.

She has lost hope. She has given up on life.

Ruth is young and despite her own loss
Is determined not to give up.

She goes out to find work.

And in the strange twist of things
That so often happens
And is never given much thought

Chances upon Boaz who takes a keen interest in her
Both for the sake of his distant cousin-in-law Naomi
And because of Ruth’s character.

This chance meeting with Boaz changes everything.

We leave them marveling over their “good fortune”.

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The story of Ruth is a story of God’s handiwork
In ordinary people, in ordinary circumstances.

This is how God works.

Ordinary people
Ordinary circumstances
Extraordinary purposes.

In fact, William Willimon, in a sermon on Ruth
Goes so far as to say that
God will save the world through ordinary people.

If we can trust God to use our ordinary love and devotion
The rubber hits the pavement kind of love
The “nose-to-the-grindstone” kind of devotion

The kind of love and devotion Ruth has for Naomi
That Boaz has for Ruth
That you have for each other

God will bless our ordinary world
With his extraordinary love!

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Of course the ultimate story of ordinary people
In ordinary circumstances
Producing extraordinary results

Is the story of the humble beginnings
Of another family many generations hence.

A father, a carpenter by trade
His betrothed, a pregnant, young woman

Who gives birth to a baby in a barn in Bethlehem
The very town we find Naomi and Ruth
Ten generations earlier.

Ordinary people
Ordinary circumstances
Extraordinary outcomes.

I close with a quote Willimon uses as he closes his sermon.

The quote is from the novel, Middlemarch, by George Eliot

*“..for the growing **good of the world** is partly dependent on unhistoric acts; and that things are not so ill with you and me as they might have been, is half owing to the number who lived faithfully a hidden life, and rest in unvisited tombs.”*

May we discover the Ruths and Boazs in our own lives
Our redeemers with a small “r”
That live faithfully hidden lives
Who will rest in unvisited tombs

They will be the ones who herald in the kingdom of God
Through the Spirit of our great Redeemer with a big “R”.

May it be so.