

Ruth 3:1-18
God's Hand in our Risk-taking
WRCoB 6.28.20

Today we continue our sermon series on the Book of Ruth.

For those who need catching up
Naomi and her husband Elimelech go to Moab
With their two sons,
To avoid a famine in Judah.

While in Moab, Naomi's husband dies
And later, her two sons die
Leaving two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth.

Naomi returns to Bethlehem
With one of her daughters-in-law, Ruth.

In Bethlehem, Ruth seeing there was nothing to eat
Goes out to glean fields behind the harvesters.

And as it happened
She found herself gleaning in the fields
Of a man named Boaz.

He is well-to-do
AND most importantly a close relative
To Naomi's deceased husband, Elimelech.

Boaz shows Ruth great kindness and generosity
By having her glean his fields.

At the end of last week

The narrator leaves us with these words.

1

Ruth 2:23b NLT And all the while she lived with her mother-in-law.

It gives us with the impression

That even with Boaz's kindness and generosity

The narrator expected something more.

Yes, Boaz had been kind to Ruth

To glean behind his harvesters.

But after weeks following behind his workers

Is this all we can expect from him?

Isn't there something more Boaz could do?

Will Boaz rise to the occasion?

Or will he need a little prodding?

2

Ruth 3:1 NLT One day Naomi said to Ruth, "My daughter, it's time that I found a permanent home for you, so that you will be provided for. ² Boaz is a close relative of ours, and he's been very kind by letting you gather grain with his workers. Tonight he will be winnowing barley at the threshing floor. ³ Now do as I tell you -- take a bath and put on perfume and dress in your nicest clothes. Then go to the threshing floor, but don't let Boaz see you until he has finished his meal. ⁴ Be sure to notice where he lies down; then go and

uncover his feet and lie down there. He will tell you what to do." ⁵ "I will do everything you say," Ruth replied.

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With the barley and wheat harvest complete
Only the threshing and winnowing of the grain remain.

Boaz and his workers begin with the barley.

The winds being too strong during the middle part of the day
Most of the threshing takes place in the evening
When the wind dies down.

We wonder why Boaz dawdles over his responsibilities.

Boaz is quite generous, to be sure.

But being a family redeemer means more
Than just allowing Ruth to glean his fields.

Jewish religion required Jewish farmers
For widows and foreigners to glean the fields.

But to be the family redeemer usually meant
Marrying the deceased relative's widow.

If not that, then at least caring for them
As one would an auntie or niece.

Boaz hesitates for some reason.

It could be he knew that he was not
The only redeemer in the family.

And he was waiting to see if one of the others
Who was closer in relationship to Naomi
Would make the first move.

It could be that Ruth and Naomi were still in mourning.

If that be the case
It would have been inappropriate to do anything
Before the period of mourning ended.

Then again, maybe Naomi was too old for his liking.
And maybe, Ruth too young.

MAYBE social norms prevent Boaz from marrying Ruth
Since she was a Moabite.

Whatever the reason
According to Naomi's way of thinking
Things weren't moving fast enough.

She needed caring for
And Ruth needed a husband
And Boaz was the only one
Who showed any empathy for them.

She takes the matter into her own hands.

She devises this scheme
That, personally, I wouldn't recommend.

She instructs Ruth to get dolled up
In her nicest things

And without anyone knowing, most particularly Boaz
Sneak up to where Boaz is sleeping
And curl up at his feet.

Quite the plan, isn't it?

And it's funny, Ruth isn't shocked by Naomi's request.

Ruth simply replies, "ok, done deal!"

3

6 So she went down to the threshing floor that night and followed the instructions of her mother-in-law. 7 After Boaz had finished his meal and was in good spirits, he lay down beside the heap of grain and went to sleep. Then Ruth came quietly, uncovered his feet, and lay down. 8 Around midnight, Boaz suddenly woke up and turned over. He was surprised to find a woman lying at his feet! 9 "Who are you?" he demanded. "I am your servant Ruth," she replied. "Spread the corner of your covering over me, for you are my family redeemer."

Wow! Plenty of sexual innuendo here!

Was this an attempt by Naomi
To put Boaz in a compromising position?

Many say Ruth was there to seduce Boaz
Thereby forcing Boaz into marriage.

Maybe so.

But it doesn't explain the fact that Ruth went to Boaz
And only AFTER he fell asleep
Did she lay down and tried NOT to wake him.

It was a risky move.

Boaz could have responded in any number of ways
Anywhere from taking advantage of her
To exposing her as a loose woman.

As I read the passage, he did neither.

Maybe I'm naïve, though I've never been accused of that
I'd like to think they maintained their integrity.

They both knew the meaning of her gesture.

They both knew she risked everything in that moment.

Her reputation was at the mercy of Boaz's response.

4

10 "The LORD bless you, my daughter!" Boaz exclaimed. "You are showing more family loyalty now than ever by not running after a younger man, whether rich or poor. 11 Now don't worry about a thing, my daughter. I will do what is necessary, for everyone in town knows you are an honorable woman. 12 But there is one problem. While it is true that I am one of your family redeemers, there is another man who is more closely related to you than I am. 13 Stay here tonight, and in the morning I will talk to him. If he is willing to redeem you, then let him marry you. But if he is not

willing, then as surely as the LORD lives, I will marry you! Now lie down here until morning."

Boaz declares Ruth's actions as honorable
Showing loyalty to her family
And a willingness to do what's best for them.

Though Boaz is completely taken by Ruth
He also knows there is another closer in relationship.

Boaz plans to do what he thinks
Is the morally right thing to do.

In the morning he will go and find this relative.

If he is willing to take responsibility for Naomi and Ruth
Then, fine, he must marry Ruth.

If not, Boaz will do it.

5

14 So Ruth lay at Boaz's feet until the morning, but she got up before it was light enough for people to recognize each other. For Boaz said, "No one must know that a woman was here at the threshing floor." 15 Boaz also said to her, "Bring your cloak and spread it out." He measured out six scoops of barley into the cloak and helped her put it on her back. Then Boaz returned to the town.

Many suggest that Boaz's request
For her to spend the rest of the night with him
Is proof that something happened.

Maybe.

Certainly all the ingredients were there for such a thing.

I believe the narrator would have said so.

The fact is, the Old Testament is never squeamish
About recording the raw, earthy things people do.

The writers call it the way they sees it.

From incest to rape and everything in between
The OT doesn't hide the many sins of its people.

And think about how Boaz would feel
If indeed, something took place.

Afterward, for him to seek the nearest of kin
To suggest that the next of kin should marry her.

What would be honorable in that?

6

16 When Ruth went back to her mother-in-law, Naomi asked, "What happened, my daughter?" Ruth told Naomi everything Boaz had done for her, **17** and she added, "He gave me these six scoops of barley and said, 'Don't go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.'" **18** Then Naomi said to her, "Just be patient, my daughter, until we hear what happens. The man won't rest until he has followed through on this. He will settle it today."

With the 6 scoops of barley grain
Some call a bride price or dowry
Others a generous gift

Boaz wants to make sure Naomi knows
His plans are in their best interests.

Not only is Boaz a man of wealth and influence
Kindhearted and generous

Not only is he a relative, a family redeemer
We see he is a man of decisiveness and action!

Things are going to happen today!

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So what do we make of this part of the story?

We see two widows living hand to mouth.

The harvest is over.

Had Ruth gathered grain enough for them to survive
Through to the next harvest season?

And if not, what would happen to them?

No worries, Naomi takes the matter into her own hands.
This situation calls for some drastic action!

As Lord Nelson puts it
“Desperate affairs require desperate measures!”

Naomi forces Boaz's hand.

Come hell or high water

They'll know what will become of them.

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In this story of Ruth

We go from the notion that by coincidence

Ruth happens upon the fields of Boaz.

That it was a fluke that Boaz happens

To be a close relative to Naomi.

TO THIS!

Naomi manipulating events to go in their favor.

In the early moments of our story

The storyteller winks at us

With the idea that it was a lucky break

Ruth chanced upon Boaz.

As if to say, we know better, don't we?

This is no coincidence!

God is all over this thing!

But now, what are we to make of Naomi's actions?

Is God working in all this maneuvering?

Is God directing Ruth's bold aggression

Toward the poor, innocent, sleeping Boaz?

We go from chance to manipulation
From happenstance to finagling.

Is God in on any of this?

I mean, we usually think of this kind of engineering
As pushing beyond the limits of God's will.

Normally, we believe
If God wills it then God will make provision for it.

We won't have to go to extreme measures to get it done.

But if we believe there is
Some sort of rhyme and reason in life
That God is working toward a set of goals

When we look back on past events
In our hindsight 20/20 vision
We do see the hand of God in it, don't we?

In this particular case, God uses Naomi's gift of manipulation
To accomplish what Boaz seemed reluctant to undertake.

Do we see God's handiwork in Naomi's bold plan?

Would it/could it have happened on its own
Without Naomi's intervention?

We will never know.

What we do know is
That without Ruth and Boaz
There would be no King David
And there would be no Jesus!

Ruth and Boaz are in their ancestry.

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And so the lesson here is this.

Don't think you've got a handle on how God works in life.

Because you don't

What we do believe is, God works.

God worked in Naomi and Ruth's suffering
God worked in their "good fortune"

And now, God is working in their wild, scheming plans.

The lesson here is that we don't know how God work
But that God does work in the overall scheme of things.

The best we can do is what St Augustine advises

Pray as though everything depended on God.
Work as though everything depended on you.

If we do
We shan't be too surprised to see God's handiwork.

To God be the glory!