

Ruth 2:1-13
God in our Luck (providence)
WRCoB 6.14.20

“Well, good luck,” I said the other day catching myself.

I say it all the time and I really don’t mean it!

I don’t mean that I hope by “chance”
Things are going to turn out well.
Because I don’t believe that.

As a person of faith, I need to come up with another phrase.

For luck, chance, fluke, or happenstance
Are not biblical concepts.

Luck comes from the idea that the world is in chaos
And every once in a while, by random chance
A couple of things come together
That brings good fortune to someone.

A biblical worldview holds that nothing is by chance
There is no such thing as dumb luck
Nothing is coincidental.

The problem with the concept of luck
Is that it leaves God out of the equation.

Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, the author of *Death and Dying* says
*There are no mistakes, no coincidences. All events are
blessings given to us to learn from.*

Last Sunday

We left Naomi and Ruth at the gates of Bethlehem
At the beginning of the barley harvest.

Our story began with a famine in Judah

Forcing Elimelech, Naomi and their two sons
To emigrate to Moab.

The death of Naomi's husband

The marriage of her two sons to foreign wives
Ten years of marriage each without children

And finally the death of both sons

Puts Naomi in a state of despair

And back on the road to her home in Bethlehem.

She is accompanied by Ruth her daughter-in-law.

Ruth is a Moabite whose devotion to her mother-in-law

Was such that she left her family

Her home, her culture, even her religion

To devote herself to the care of Naomi.

Such was the love of Ruth toward her mother-in-law.

They stand at the brink of an unknown future

But the barley harvest is about begin and hope is in the air.

1

Ruth 2 Now there was a wealthy and influential man in Bethlehem named Boaz, who was a relative of Naomi's husband, Elimelech.

Now if you and I were Jewish
This information would be of particular interest.

Boaz, a man of good standing in the community
Wealthy and influential is related to Naomi?

My, my!

A Jew knows that Levirate law
Requires a brother or cousin
Of a deceased man
To marry his brother's widow
Allowing the family line to continue.

We begin to wonder
How Boaz plays into the story?

2

²One day Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go out into the harvest fields to pick up the stalks of grain left behind by anyone who is kind enough to let me do it." Naomi replied, "All right, my daughter, go ahead."

Whether due to old age, a despondent spirit, or pride
Naomi stays behind.

According to Leviticus
Farmers were to leave grain at the edges of a field
Nor rake grain that had fallen to the ground.

3 Leviticus 19:9 you shall leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the LORD your God.

4

3 So Ruth went out to gather grain behind the harvesters. And as it happened, she found herself working in a field that belonged to Boaz, the relative of her father-in-law, Elimelech.

Okay, so this is what I'm talking about.

The narrator of the story writes, "and as it happened!"

Another translation puts it, "And wouldn't you know it!"
As if to say, "as luck would have it!"

Okay, to me, this is a huge clue
On the subtle theological message
In the story of Ruth.

To the characters and to the listeners of our story,
All this appears to have happened by chance.

As if it were a fluke that Ruth
Just so happens to glean from Mr. Boaz' field!

Ever so slowly, we become aware of the hand of Providence

5

4 While she was there, Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters. "The Lord be with you!" he said. "The Lord bless you!" the harvesters replied.

6

⁵ Then Boaz asked his foreman, “Who is that young woman over there? Who does she belong to?”

⁶ And the foreman replied, “She is the young woman from Moab who came back with Naomi. ⁷ She asked me this morning if she could gather grain behind the harvesters. She has been hard at work ever since, except for a few minutes’ rest in the shelter.”

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This Mr. Boaz is no absentee landowner!

He arrives in the morning

To check on the progress of the harvest.

He greets his employees respectfully

And they in return respectfully greet him back.

He strives for good employer/employee relationships.

He notices Ruth and asks about her.

And the foreman replies that she is the young Moabite

That accompanied Naomi back home.

The foreman relays that Ruth asked permission

And having received it

Has been hard at it since morning.

7

⁸ Boaz went over and said to Ruth, “Listen, my daughter. Stay right here with us when you gather grain; don’t go to any other fields. Stay right behind the young women working in my field. ⁹ See which part of the field they are harvesting, and then follow them. I have warned the

young men not to treat you roughly. And when you are thirsty, help yourself to the water they have drawn from the well.”

~~

The work setting is gender inclusive.

Men and women both are hard at work in the field.

Note, also how Boaz calls Ruth, *my daughter*.

It's not done much in our culture

But in many cultures family terms are often used
To designate a relationship.

In Nigeria, all my nephews and nieces call me “daddy”.

Boaz uses the term daughter

To show Ruth he is there to care for her.

The foreman calls her the Moabite

But Boaz calls her, *my daughter*.

Already, Boaz assumes the role of provider and protector.

8

¹⁰ Ruth fell at his feet and thanked him warmly. “What have I done to deserve such kindness?” she asked. “I am only a foreigner.”

Boaz's treatment surprises her.

She expected a more typical racist response.

“I am only a foreigner she says”

“I expected to be treated differently somehow”

”I am surprised you treated me with such kindness.”

If only that could be the response of the refugees

Seeking asylum at the gates of our great nation.

9

11 “Yes, I know,” Boaz replied. “But I also know about everything you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband. I have heard how you left your father and mother and your own land to live here among complete strangers.

Rumor has it, so Boaz says.

Word has gotten around you left your family and your home

To live here in foreign lands

For the sake of your mother-in-law.

Ruth’s character precedes her.

Boaz blesses her.

10

12 May the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge, reward you fully for what you have done.”

11

13 “I hope I continue to please you, sir,” she replied. “You have comforted me by speaking so kindly to me, even though I am not one of your workers.”

For now, we leave them there in the field of barley.

A couple of things are noteworthy in the Book of Ruth.

In Ruth, God doesn't make a big scene.

No, seriously, there's no burning bush

No parting of the Red Sea

No lightning storm on the mountain

No, "thus saith the Lord!"

Not even a still, small, voice from God

Nothing.

Even the narrator strangely leaves God out

When he says that it just so happened

That Ruth picked Boaz's field above all fields.

Nonetheless, God permeates the story.

Sort of like in our own lives, isn't it?

Most of the time God feels more like an abstract thought

Than a reality.

A spiritual construct we create

To make sense out of our lives.

We say, "Wow, what a coincidence"

Or "Better luck next time"

And yet, I am convinced, God permeates our stories too.

Someone once said a coincidence is a miracle
In which God prefers to remain anonymous.

Little did Ruth feel then, the hand of Providence in her life.

The narrator eludes to it.

Ruth knew nothing of how God was setting the stage
Using her as one of the primary characters.

In fact, she ended up never knowing
How God ultimately used her for his purposes
Both in the future of Israel
And in the redemption of humankind.

We have seen Ruth suffer tremendous loss
And we have seen her rise above her sufferings.

Often those very things that seek to destroy us
Are the very things that build us up.

For now, oblivious to the hand of God
And having suffered immensely

Ruth smiles at her “good fortune”
And how, by “chance”, she meets Boaz.

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But isn't that just the way it is?

Many of us go through life
Our nose to the grindstone
Completely unaware of God's activity.

Then something happens
And we say, "Wow! That's a coincidence!"
And pass it off as chance.

I grant you, God's providence is a mystery.

And without the perspective of hindsight
We stumble along in the present
Oblivious to how God is working.

What IS obvious to Ruth is that Boaz
A man of wealth and influence
Has taken an interest in her.

He has shown her kindness
And given her opportunity.
Both of which surprises her.

She expected certain treatment as a foreigner and widow
Someone unworthy of notice
Or worse, to be taken advantage of.

But Boaz believed otherwise.

All of us could be a bit more like kindhearted Boaz.

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In the story of Ruth
God acts through normal circumstances.

God works through the faithfulness and goodness
Of ordinary people, like Ruth a Moabite
Like Boaz, an Israelite farmer

Like you and like me, ordinary, everyday kind of people.

If you truly want to discover God's blessings
Look for them in human interaction.

Boaz sees Ruth's devotion and hard work
Praises her without prejudice for her loyalty
And generously responds to her needs.

And then bestows a blessing on her
For finding refuge under the wings of God.

From under whose shadow does she find refuge?

Yes, ultimately God's
But presently under the wings of Boaz.

May God continue to do God's work incognito
Through those who show love and devotion
And those who show mercy and kindness.

To God be the Glory!