

Ruth Part 2

Well I see quite a few faces that were here last Sunday, thank you for coming back.

Thank you Nigel for bringing us up to date in such a lovely way!

Today we have read from:

Gen 12.1-5 (Abram left his land, his people, his family... on a promise that Ruth finds herself the very object all those years later.

John 1.1-14, and we read about the incarnation, when Jesus left the comfort, security and many of the privileges that came with living in heaven, to come to our aid.

So I hope these passages have inspired you and given you a chance to respond, and perhaps began so soften our hearts.

If you weren't here last Sunday, we are talking about Ruth. It would probably pay to keep your Bibles open. I've divided the story into three Sundays and today is Sunday number two.

We've followed the story from when:

- Naomi & husband move to Moab (famine)
- 10 years: All men die, famine eases, the women decide to move back.
- 3 on the side of the road: Go-no-cry-kiss-stay-[bis]-one-stays-one-goes
- Ruth and Naomi set off and arrive in Bethlehem.

And this brings us back to verse 19-22: **"So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem.(...) arriving (...) as the barley harvest was beginning."**

Time we notice had not been kind on Naomi, who is hardly recognisable to her old acquaintances... who are going **"can this be Naomi?"**

To which she replies (20-21):

"20 "Don't call me Naomi,[pleasant]" she told them. "Call me Mara,[bitter] because the Almighty[d] has made my life very bitter. 21 I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi?"

They arrive in low spirits, possibly low self esteem, and gloomy long term prospects... But at the perfect time to look for some temp work... this would have been probably around April - the Barley harvest.

2 Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side, a man of standing from the clan of Elimelek, whose name was Boaz.

2 And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, "Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor."

You know... Ruth probably did not have to glean back home (definition on screen), but good on her not to get stuck in the house feeling sorry for herself. Although we never see her complaining, I am sure it was hard.

One of the interviewed people, after immigrating to NZ at the age of 6 decided to go back to her country of birth in her mid 20's to teach English and reconnect with the culture. She said that it soon became almost debilitating to have to teach "a is for apple, b is for ball, cat, dog".

Another person who had immigrated to Israel before coming to NZ, struggled to see her father - a qualified doctor - working in a candle factory for some time before getting his first job at a hospital.

Did you know that a significant proportion of taxi drivers in Auckland are qualified doctors?

So Ruth puts her hand up and Naomi says "go ahead my daughter" by the way, up until the end of last chapter Ruth was the daughter in law, now Naomi addresses her as daughter.

So Ruth went out and "3 (...)entered a field and began to glean behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she was working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelek." KJV "as her hap (luck) would have it" and as it turns out Boaz was a follower of God. He arrives and greets his employees with a classic Hebrew greeting: "The Lord be with you", workers reply: "the Lord bless you" (verse 4)

Now the next verse can be a bit unsettling regarding the place of women in society.

Boaz turns to his task master and asks him (5) ["Who does that young woman belong to?"] - slide

As one of the interviewed people put it, Ruth was a woman that was "owned by someone, became owned by no one; needed to owned by someone else".

So I want to again stress that not everything that is described in the Bible is prescribed in the Bible.

"Who does that young woman belong to?" That's the only way he knew how to even put that sentence together back then... so the overseer replies (6-&): notice how positive this report is:

"She is the Moabite who came back from Moab with Naomi. 7 She said, ['Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters.' She came into the field and has remained here from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter."] - slide

Even before Ruth is ever given a voice, the way she carries herself is already speaking volumes. Without saying much she has already taught us a lot:

- She Volunteers
- Polite
- Starts low (not based on CV, experience or her perception of status)
- She works hard

And it absolutely pays off... it is likely that until now the conversation had been going on between the men. But instead of turning to the overseer and telling him what to say to Ruth, Boaz turns to her and addresses her personally. This is huge.

“My daughter, listen to me. Don’t go and glean in another field and don’t go away from here. Stay here with the women who work for me. **9** Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the women. I have told the men not to lay a hand on you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled.”

How about this for a contract!?

- Don’t go work with anyone else (condition)
- Stay in my fields, watch & follow my staff
- You will be safe & will not be thirsty & (later v.14) hungry

So it comes as no surprise that Ruth simply bows down, completely overwhelmed by grace (10)... Why!?

“Why have I found such favour in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?”

And Boaz tells her. I mean, she thought that Boaz had noticed her just by what the overseer had reported, she has no idea what’s coming.

It is almost as if she had jumped the gun prostrating falling for it too soon, because what Boaz was about to tell her was way deeper and powerful. She thought he saw her, but he was looking into her very soul. He said (11-12):

["I’ve been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband—how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. **12** May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge."] - 2 slides

That day out on a paddock, somewhere around Bethlehem, she just went from being a:

1. nobody to being a
2. recognised hard worker to being
3. respected for her character.



**Seen - Acknowledged - Respected

Folks there is no money in the world that could buy that feeling.

Ruth takes the whole thing again quite humbly. She says:

13 “May I continue to find favour in your eyes, my lord,” she said. “You have put me at ease by speaking kindly to your servant—though I do not have the standing of one of your servants.”

To top it off, Boaz goes on and adds food to the deal. He gives her enough lunch that there's leftover for her to take to Ruth...

Waldir, that's all fine and good, but I am not an immigrant, I am not a refugee, I am not a newcomer.

Let's say you are not new to NZ, Dunedin, job, church, neighbourhood, etc... One way you could possibly engage with this story is this (kindly picked up on by one of my dear interviewees):

We can all work hard to create a space where newcomers can feel:

- **Safe** - "you can work here Ruth, you'll be safe"
- **Appreciated** for their work & who they are - "I see you"
- **Basic needs are met** - "hey if you're thirsty, go and drink from my jars; here's some lunch, take some home"
- **Connected** - use our influence & connections to help them find employment & opportunities.

He created a space where she was safe, appreciated, could eat & drink, and had space to thrive.

[15 As she got up to glean, Boaz gave orders to his men, "Let her gather among the sheaves and don't reprimand her. 16 Even pull out some stalks for her from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up, and don't rebuke her.]" - slide

Hold on now, this is getting a bit too much here. That's bordering on unfair. Is it? She was clearly being allowed to break the rules...was this some sort of a hand out?

Fair? Discuss with your neighbour. (ask for comments and reflect back)

Ok so let's take a step out of Palestine during the time of the Judges...

Has anyone ever felt, or let's keep it safe, heard of someone else that feels uncomfortable with the idea that some people can get a benefit even if they are not looking really hard for work? Has anyone come across people that feel their sense of justice is offended by that fact that there are mitigating factors built into university admissions criteria that seem to favour some ethnicities? I have.

Well Boaz is doing this here. She was clearly being allowed to break the rules... most/some people seem to think (yes/no/maybe)...

I wonder if Boaz felt so strongly about the God-given mandate to take care for "foreigners and widows", repeated in Scripture consistently.

Is it possible that he felt so compelled as a servant of Yahweh, to care precisely for the marginalised, the vulnerable and the disenfranchised.

Is there any chance that when he saw Ruth working for scraps on one of his fields, Ruth both a foreigner and a widow, he came to the conclusion that helping her more might have been the absolute fairest thing to do.

Gosh this is heavy... but it is something we need to continue to ask ourselves, and my prayer is that as we surrender more and more of ourselves to this God we say we follow... that more of His care for the vulnerable & marginalised may become visible in our lives.

Ok let me try to lighten the mood, this is something a friend sent and he thought it went well with the series on Ruth:

"I hopped on to my motorbike,
Ruth rode at the back of me.
I hit bump at 65
and rode on Ruthlessly."

Without giving away too much, I think it is fair to say that at the end Boaz was not a Ruthless master (...), and probably not an unfair one either.

But that is not to say that every single person on the team will have taken it well, even some of us here might have taken exception to the way he handled things.

Jealousy is a powerful driver of human evil. Hitler felt that way about the wealth of the Jews; Cain felt that way about Abel's sacrifice and killed him...

Ruth was probably not terribly ugly, she had the protection and favour of the boss... is it possible or probably that there might have been some jealousy going around!? So it really came as no surprise when one of the interviewees reported the same problem: Born overseas, moved to NZ as a child, was educated in NZ, got a degree, then went back to her country of origin for a couple of years to try and reconnect with some of her roots.

She spoke English and the other language fluently, she dressed differently, she had a western confidence about her that comes from being brought up in a more egalitarian society, and the guys found that attractive, which in turn made most other females at work and at church, quite jealous and standoffish.

So it is probably good to remind ourselves that all of this favour, this wonderful provision at such a critical time, may have had a painful social cost.

And it is a sore reminder that however hard we work and succeed, however much favour we find, there will always be unfulfilled gaps in our hearts.

Let me encourage you: One day, all of us, in all of those secret blind corners of our souls where we feel utterly vulnerable and helpless...

One day: we will have to glean no more. We will be welcomed into a place where safety, acceptance, belonging, will be common place, favour and honour will be common place.

We know this is coming, I don't know about you, but I rely heavily on these wee morsels of hope we get from Scripture.

We have this knowledge, what do we do with it? I mean do we sit around waiting for that glorious day?

Ruth had just been told a lot of nice things, she knew she had found favour in the eyes of the Boss, she knew her future was pretty much taken care of... so what does she do? Knock off early? she had probably gathered enough by then.. Leave with the regular workers? by then she had certainly done her days' work

No. She works until dark, as if nothing had happened. (17)

[17 So Ruth gleaned in the field until evening. Then she threshed the barley she had gathered, and it amounted to about an ephah.] - slide (A bit more than our mitre 10 bucket)

As soon as Ruth walk through that door, Naomi has one look at her (she sees the big bag of grain and the leftover lunch) and starts bombarding her with questions... (19)

“Where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be the man who took notice of you!”

Ruth at this stage is probably walking on cloud 9, she's got butterflies in her stomach, but she is completely oblivious to one very important piece of information: “oh by the way Naomi, today I worked **in the field of Boaz**”

Immediately the cogs start spinning... “Ruth this is not just good, it is crazy good! (20) **he is a close relative; he is our guardian redeemer**”.

No one knows if Ruth even knew what a guardian redeemer was... who cares, she was in love!

She told Naomi he had offered her a job for the whole harvest season and Ruth said good, that means you'll be safe.

So Ruth not only worked that whole day until dark, but she worked until the end of the season.

23 So Ruth stayed close to the women of Boaz to glean until the barley and wheat harvests were finished. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

We don't know how long it took them, it depends on the size of the field, number of workers, weather... but what we do know is that she stuck at it til the very end. Until there was no more barley to be harvested.

She was/we are - **summary slide**:

- Proactive - She Volunteered.
- Polite -
- Humble - willing to start from the bottom
- Hard Worker

- PERSEVERED until the job was done.

We are left with the challenge of either following in her footsteps, of creating an environment for people like her to thrive... a space where:

- people are safe,
- appreciated,
- have enough to eat & drink,
- are connected & can feel like they belong.

Next week: Naomi comes up with a crazy - bordering on dodgy - plan; Ruth puts on her game face, makes herself very vulnerable again, and ends up proposing to Boaz. But they can't get married straight away, there is a problem (...)

Tune in next week to find out more.