

Ruth 3 The Kinsman Redeemer. 1 Peter 1 :18-21 Jesus our Saviour Redeemer.
17/11/2024

Prayer: May the Holy Spirit open our hearts that we may be filled with the richness of your word this morning Lord we pray. Amen.

I wonder who has the best marriage proposal story among us? The most romantic? The most memorable? The most bizarre?

My husband Michael likes to tell the story that he was blackmailed into marrying me to fulfil the wishes of my dying father! Ours is not a very romantic story... more of a conversation rather than a proposal, a conversation during a visit to my parents where my father was dying, a trip to the local fish and chip shop where the conversation was interrupted when the order was ready. A conversation that was finished after dinner on a walk around the block and a hug and a prayer on street corner, followed by Michael telling my father that we were going to get married. My father died with this knowledge 4 weeks later.

I think Ruth's marriage proposal to Boaz takes the prize for the most bizarre as we read the details in chapter 3 today...

First, a quick recap of Ruth so far. In chapter 1 we heard of a famine in Bethlehem, the house of bread, and we follow the story of Naomi's family who leave and go to Moab in search of food and employment. During their stay Naomi's husband dies, her sons marry Moabite women and then they too die. She is left a widow, in a foreign country with no sons or grandchildren. She hears the famine is over in Bethlehem and decides to return. Her daughter in law Ruth is so loyal and kind that she returns with Naomi even though she will then be a marginalized widow in a foreign country.

Naomi feels bitter and blames God for bringing affliction upon her, leaving her empty. In chapter 2 however, hope returns as Ruth goes to glean wheat in a field that just happens to belong to a relative of Naomi's – Boaz. Here we see God's providential grace. Surely God guided Ruth's footsteps to that particular field where Boaz is a man of faith and is, like Ruth, full of hesed – loving, loyal kindness. He protects her and sends her home full of food to share with Naomi.

We see how God's laws (that we can read about in Leviticus) are being practiced by Boaz showing God's compassion and care for the marginalized in providing food for those in need.

But Naomi's hope is in so much more than just the provision of food as Ruth gleans in Boaz's field. She recognizes Boaz as a relative – a kinsman or guardian redeemer – who could rescue them from their pitiful status as widows.

Like the gleaning laws to provide for the hungry, God had also made laws to protect widows to keep the family name and property.

We don't know how long Ruth continued gleaning wheat in the property of and under the protection of Boaz before Naomi comes up with a plan that will ensure that both she and Ruth are safe and secure under his care forever.

When Boaz first met Ruth, he had heard about her kindness to Naomi, and he had prayed that her kindness would be repaid and richly blessed by God under whose wings she had come to take refuge. I wonder if he knew that he would be the answer to his prayer for her...

Did he know that he was a kinsman redeemer? If so, why didn't he take the initiative in proposing to Ruth? But that would have made for a much shorter and not so interesting story!

Naomi knew what his responsibilities were, and she knew just what Ruth had to do. It was the parents' responsibility to arrange marriages in those days and right from the beginning Naomi had been concerned about finding a new husband for Ruth and now it seems the answer has come along, and she must plan carefully.

You can see how Naomi must have been plotting this, for she knows the night when Boaz will be staying on the threshing floor after winnowing barley. Rather than going home for the night he will stay and share a bit of a feast with his workers. She tells Ruth to *wash, put on perfume, and get dressed in your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don't let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do.*

This little book of Ruth is getting intriguing, and you may think is about to turn ungodly!

We can perhaps imagine Ruth lurking in the shadows with a big shawl covering her so she wouldn't be recognized just watching and waiting for the time for her to act and obey her mother-in-law's instructions. She was an obedient daughter to Naomi, and she did just what she was told...to a point!

Naomi had said that Boaz would tell her what to do, but when Boaz wakes up in the middle of the night from cold feet? (is that why she was to uncover his feet?!), it is Ruth who speaks once she has answered his initial question of "who are you?"

Humble as ever, Ruth says she is his servant, but then boldly makes a request of Boaz. *"Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a guardian-redeemer of our family."* Ruth, a Moabite foreigner, has indeed put her trust in God and sees herself a full part of Naomi's family (*your people will be my people, and your God will be my God*, Ruth

had declared to Naomi) and therefore she could put herself in this position seeking protection from Boaz.

Be assured, it seems there is no sexual practice going on here. Her laying at his feet was a sign of humility, not of seeking sexual favours, and Boaz is quick to protect her excellent reputation and ensures, one, that she doesn't walk home in the middle of the night where she might be accosted (remember we are in the dark time of the Judges), and two, he ensures that she leaves before anyone would see her with him on the threshing floor. But he also assures her that he will take action to ensure that she and Naomi are protected and redeemed, but he tells Ruth that there is a closer relative that has first rights and responsibilities to this family. If he does not redeem them, then Boaz will.

We see the selflessness of both Ruth and Boaz in this interaction. Ruth was much younger than Boaz, we know nothing of her feelings for him, but we see her loyalty to Naomi. Her priority is to her mother-in-law, to protect the family property and carry on her dead husband's name. Boaz recognizes this and comments again on Ruth's kindness and prays God's blessing on her. Ruth is exemplified here as a woman of great and noble character that all the people of the town know about and admire, despite her being a foreigner.

She would be a great catch as a wife, and you get the sense that Boaz is taken with her even at their first meeting. But he too is a man of noble character and seeks to do the right thing first and so he is willing to pay the price of losing her if the closer relative chooses to redeem her and Naomi. But if the other man chooses not to take on the family responsibility, Boaz will willingly care for both Ruth and Naomi.

Before Ruth leaves Boaz, he fills her shawl with 6 measures of barley to take home to Naomi. He then immediately heads to town to find their nearer relative and sort out the kinsman- redeemer issue, and whether it will be him or someone else who will marry Ruth.

Ruth reports to Naomi all that had happened, and Naomi is satisfied that the matter will be quickly settled. The 6 measures of barley are almost like a down-payment, a sign to Naomi that Boaz will do his best to ensure they are looked after. But did you hear the words he said to Ruth as he gave her the barley? *"Don't go back to your mother-in-law empty handed."*

When Naomi had arrived in Bethlehem, she had declared that she had *"gone away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty"*.

Since coming back to Bethlehem, the Lord has been restoring Naomi, filling her emptiness. She has seen the Lord's hand blessing them with his abundant grace. This gift of barley is just another sign of his blessings, filling her emptiness.

Naomi's husband had made an unwise decision to leave the promised land, to leave the town known as the house of bread when famine struck, and life got difficult. He went to a country who worshipped other gods. Things did not go well for him or his sons.

Naomi, it seemed remained faithful to the God of Israel. She may have blamed God for her situation and was bitter, but she did return to the place of bread when she heard the famine was over. God did not forsake her, he called her back, he guided her and Ruth's footsteps and we see his providential grace in providing for them. We see his abundant blessings through his servant Boaz who lavishes them with food and protection and who now seeks to ensure they will continue to be protected.

Boaz is willing to spread his garment over them, just like God spreads his wings over us to protect us when we go to him for refuge. It is such a wonderful image. Listen again to these words from psalm 91. *He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty, I will say of the Lord 'he is my refuge and my fortress, my God in whom I trust.' ... He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will refuge...*

Naomi doesn't know the outcome of the request to Boaz, but she is now in a position where she is hopeful and trusts that all will be well in God's timing. (Tune in next week for the final episode and outcome of this story!)

Have you ever walked away from the Lord when life gets difficult and like Naomi's husband Elimelech, seek help and answers elsewhere?

God calls us back to himself, he asks us to trust him, he is the only one in whom we can find real security. He is the one who can break our famine and fill our emptiness. Naomi returned to Bethlehem, the house of bread and learnt to put her trust in God again as she witnessed his mercy and abundant grace, experiencing him filling her emptiness.

God longs for us to return to him, whenever we stray, he calls us back or goes out to meet us. He sent Jesus as our guardian-redeemer. Like Ruth who becomes part of the family of Naomi and her God, we are adopted into God's family as we put our trust in him. Jesus will fill us with all we need. If Bethlehem is the place of bread, Jesus says he is the *Bread of Life!* In John 6 we read, *I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.* Jesus is the only one who will truly satisfy and meet all our needs. In Mark 10:45 we read that Jesus came to earth to serve and to give his life as a ransom, he is our Saviour redeemer as the apostle Peter clearly points out in his letter that we heard read this morning...

We are redeemed from the empty (hear that word that Naomi was feeling) way of life...with the precious blood of Christ...(1 Peter 1: 18-19)

If you are feeling far away from God, or feeling bitter or empty, then turn to him and seek refuge under his wings. Lie at his feet and he will cover you with his garment. Call on Jesus and be filled by him, the bread of life. In John 10 Jesus says that he came that we might have life, not empty but full, abundant life.

As the Parish of Bass and Phillip Island we can thank God for his many blessings and abundant grace. We thank God for Jesus who proposes to us, asks us to be his bride – the Church. I pray that we will put our trust in the Lord to provide for us, that we will turn to him when we are anxious about the way forward and that we will be a blessing to others as we live out our faith in the communities in which we live.

Let us pray: Father, thank you for this story of Ruth, where we clearly see your abundant grace and kindness shown to those who are marginalized. Help us to always turn to you for refuge and strength, to be filled by you. Help us also to be your people, just like Ruth and Boaz, showing your abundant grace and kindness to others.

I pray we may always stay under the shelter of your wings. Amen.