

Sermon 101115 Redemption
Scripture Ruth 3: 9-12
Sermon Title Sweet Love

Today is the second strait sermon in which we are looking at the short but lovely Hebrew Bible book named Ruth. Last week we heard of Ruth's extraordinary loyalty to her mother-in-law, Naomi. Today I want to get deeper into the story and see what we find.

If you remember, after Ruth makes her beautiful pledge to Naomi (where you go, I will go and where you stay I will stay...), they leave Moab (modern day Jordan) to travel to the town of Bethlehem, which became the home town of Ruth's great grandson, King David of David and Goliath fame and eventually the birthplace of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

As you will recall, Ruth and Naomi were desperate widows when they got to Bethlehem. Ruth gets the idea to get food by going to the fields and scavenging after the harvesters harvest the grain. Ruth caught the eye of the owner of the fields named Boaz. Boaz is a fairly prosperous farmer and a good man. Boaz is also a distant cousin to Elimelech Ruth's deceased father-in-law.

When they first meet, the dialog is interesting. Boaz seems smitten. He suggested that Ruth stay in his field where she will be safe. Boaz tries to sound businesslike, but Ruth appears to be doing some polite flirting by saying, "Why have I found such favor

in your eyes?” The question seems to make Boaz uncomfortable. Perhaps I’m over reading this but I don’t think so. Things move along rather quickly and in 2:14 they have their first ‘date’ as Boaz invites Ruth to have lunch with him.

Then Boaz tells his workmen to leave plenty of extra sheaves of grain on the ground so it’ll be easy for Ruth. The workers must have been rolling their eyes and smiling at one another over their ‘smitten’ boss.

Ruth returns to Naomi, loaded down with more grain than Naomi could have possibly hoped for. Ruth tells Naomi what happened in the fields. Naomi gets to thinking, or planning as a good mother (or mother-in-law) would.

Even tough things have gone well for Ruth, and Boaz apparently continues to look out for her during the harvest, the relationship seems to have stalled. Boaz may have been busy with the harvest or maybe is just slow to move the relationship to the next level. So Naomi decides to give him a big nudge.

As was the tradition, after threshing all the wheat all day, Boaz and his workers celebrate the harvest with a feast. After eating and drinking they sleep right there on the threshing floor.

Naomi hatches her plan. She instructs Ruth to clean up, put on her best dress, and even add perfume. (3:1-3) Following Naomi’s instructions, Ruth waits until the men are asleep, then

sneaks into the threshing floor area and lies down at the feet of sleeping Boaz. Before long, Boaz wakes up and is surprised to find a woman there with him in the dark. Ruth identifies herself and states, “Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer.” If Boaz let’s her spend the night, then in the eyes of the community, they are married. If he sends her away, she will be humiliated.

Boaz is no doubt wide-awake by now. He complements her on her character stating, “All my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of noble character.” (3:11) This is a direct quote, by the way, from the Book of Proverbs.

Now remember, Boaz is a distant cousin of Ruth’s deceased husband and deceased father-in-law Elimelech. Boaz knows that another relative has first rights to marry Ruth. So Boaz has a quandary. Essentially, he tells Ruth that he will marry her if he can work things out with the other relative. He does that the next day in the town court by buying Elimelech’s land.

The town elders approve this and call on the Lord to bless Ruth giving her full acceptance in the community. So Ruth and Boaz marry and have a son (a sigh of blessing). They didn’t know how big a blessing it was because that son would become the grandfather of the great King David.

So Boaz has the financial where-with-all to have Ruth and Naomi, who started destitute in the story to live lives of relative comfort. So what can we take away from this classic ‘boy meets girl’ story?

First of all, the three main characters are all good people. Also, unlike in other stories and Bible stories where bad things happen to good people and people do bad things. In this story, good people do good things and good things happen to good people. How refreshing is that?

There is a word that keeps coming up in the Book of Ruth that would likely confuse Christians. The word is redemption. We also read the word redeemer in the story. When Christians hear the word we tend to think of redemption as salvation. We think of being forgiven for our sins and resolving to be a disciple of Jesus. We call Jesus redeemer.

That is not the concept of redemption here in the Hebrew Bible. Here we have two women who are destitute because of circumstances beyond their control. They end up being saved from that by a good man because of love. That’s what redemption is in the context of Ruth.

This is another example of God working behind the scenes in the Bible. Ruth shows her character in her loyalty to Naomi. From Boaz we learn that God’s people can live in faithful

obedience to God even if the society is acting contrary to God's will.

From this story we learn that God often works quietly behind the scenes through regular people (like you). We may not recognize it when it is happening but it can teach us how blessed we are.

Yes, God is acting through us when we are loyal and when we love. This is a lesson from this wonderful little book called Ruth.

AMEN