

## **“Easter Cows”**

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Mark 16:1-8

We shout hallelujah, Jesus is risen!  
And we celebrate, because we look  
back on the resurrection with the  
advantage of time to see the  
amazing thing that God has done.

However, that first Easter was very  
different. This morning we have  
heard from the four gospels the  
account of the resurrection. I would  
like to point to one theme this  
morning.

Jesus’ work of forgiveness of sins  
was done on Friday, but nothing  
had changed yet in the world. The  
same Roman government ruled,  
the same systems of injustice  
reigned. The same religious  
leaders who had killed Jesus were  
in power.

The disciples didn’t know quite  
what to make of the resurrection,  
and they were scared.

There was a similar theme in the  
life of a man named Boaz Keibarak,  
a person I learned about recently  
through Dan and Sharon Buttry,  
American Baptist missionaries

working for peace and justice  
around the globe.

Boaz was born in rural northern  
Kenya. His father left when he was  
very young and his mother  
remarried a man who was not so  
nice. He had a couple of step  
brothers who wanted his  
inheritance and things became  
volatile. Boaz left home to protect  
his mother from violence at about  
11 or 12 years old.

On his own, he found a cattle farm  
and began working as a hired  
hand. He worked on the farm for a  
period of time, then got wrongly  
accused of corrupt business and  
fled for his life, leaving him once  
again on his own.

When he was about 15-years-old, a  
Christian family found him and took  
him in. Very quickly he became a  
leader in their church congregation.  
Into his 20s, Boaz worked into  
leadership in his church.

He saw divisions among the church  
congregations in his area, but  
rather than being disillusioned by  
the church and leaving, he held  
onto the bigger vision for the new  
kingdom that God showed him was  
possible. So he dedicated himself  
to build that church. He set his

heart, mind, and energy toward bringing people together in peace.

The whole region of Kenya where Boaz lives was, and is still, full of corruption and violence — but God called him to be a peacemaker.

I need to give a bit of cultural context for where Boaz lives so you can understand what he is now doing and why.

For many generations, there has been a history of cattle rustling in the pastoral lands of northern Kenya, mainly between two tribes of people, the Turkanas and Pokots. The conflict happens mainly along their tribal borders over territory, and in particular cattle, as the tribes routinely raid each other.

The traditional weapons of these raids used to be the *rungus*, a kind of handheld club, along with bows and arrows. There were always some casualties, but in recent years the violence has significantly escalated. The cause for the escalation has been the increased arms trade. Now both sides are armed with AR-47s.

The introduction of guns into the tribal conflict did three things.

First, it upped the stakes of their conflict so that many more die during these cattle raids.

Secondly, adding guns to the mix fueled greed to take land from their neighbors for other resources like oil wells and water aquifers.

Thirdly, the conflicts have become so violent that the local police stay clear for fear of their own lives.

Case in point: In December of 2012, Kenyan police responded to a violent tribal raid that left 42 officers killed from gunfire.

Another dimension of the Kenyan culture, also involving cattle, is the oppressive system of a dowry paid by a man to the father of a woman he wants to marry. A typical dowry is 70 cows. If the man only pays a portion up front and does not make good on the balance, the father-in-law can, by law, take back his daughter and charge double, (140 cows) before giving her back. Further muddying the water, if a father-in-law gets greedy enough, in their polygamous culture, he can marry off his daughter to multiple men to bolster his herd.

So, cattle are a hot commodity in Kenya. And now that guns are a part of the raids, many more young

men are killed in order to steal cows both for dowries and for profit.

In 2013, after one of these conflicts, Dan and Sharon Buttry were at a peacemaking event in Kenya. While there, Sharon told me that she felt an unusually strong and uncharacteristic urge to approach this young man she saw from across the crowd and introduce herself. It was Boaz. Dan and Sharon invited him to take their 10-day conflict transformation training, which he was eager to do.

Immediately after that training, a horribly violent incident broke out between the Turkanas and Pokots leading to the death of more than 130 people. Driven by the vision God gave him of a world at peace and with new skills to make a difference, Boaz quickly entered the fray to speak with tribal leaders.

He negotiated a disengagement of the warring groups, then set up mediation and reconciliation dialogue with the leaders to prevent small issues from reigniting the violence, and to reduce cattle rustling.

He brought in another individual from Dan's training to help with additional conflict transformation trainings between these two

warring tribes. He organized a peace walk that brought the tribes together, and worked to restore trust among the police, who have been afraid to get involved.

He has started a number of initiatives that work to foster peace, rebuild communication, develop resources, and address the negative impact of illegal arms in their communities.

He began a voluntary inter-tribe disarmament campaign that has restored the possibility of relationships between the tribes and with the government.

Beyond the local communities, Boaz has been active nationally with the Education Peace Torch Campaign. And as a co-founder of the Pan-African Peace Network he has now led conflict transformation trainings for chiefs and tribal leaders in Zimbabwe.

In addition to this peace work, today, Boaz is also pastoring (without pay) one of two churches that include people from both tribes. While the system of injustice is still alive and well, what Boaz is committed to is an amazing statement that unity and peace is possible in God's kingdom!

Sharon describes Boaz as someone with more courage than anyone else in her and Dan's network of peacemakers around the world. The two of them have become like adopted parents to Boaz, who has been without parents since about the age of 11.

About seven years ago Boaz married Sophia and has a couple of beautiful children. However, prior to the wedding, Boaz sold some of his cows in order to do some crucial peacemaking work as war broke out in the region leaving him short of his dowery. His father-in-law recently threatened to take Sophia and demand 140 cows to have her back, something he can do legally.

Wanting to help, Dan and Sharon sent out the word for financial help. By grace, they received \$3,000, so Boaz now has enough money to buy the cows he needs for breeding in order to be free from the debt owed to his father-in-law.

In a way, these are his Easter Cows — they offer him and Sophia freedom from the debt that has a grip on their lives.

Cows are their way out, and yet the system of injustice is still churning forward around them, much like the

disciples after the resurrection of Jesus.

In a few minutes we will take a special communion offering to support Boaz in his peacemaking work in Kenya and other African countries. Dan and Sharon are now at work filing the paperwork to help Boaz become established in the International Missionary network of American Baptists so that his peacemaking ministry can continue to be funded.

As I reflected on Boaz's story, I have been struck by the similarity to the resurrection story.

Jesus, willingly and out of love, went to the cross completing the work needed to fulfill the promise of a new creation, a new way to be human, a new way for all of humanity to be God's community. Jesus had a vision for how all peoples could live at peace, as one. He was willing to give his life for that vision.

As I mentioned earlier, after the resurrection, nothing looked different in the world of injustice for Jesus' disciples and they were scared. Even though the work of redemption was done, the world hadn't changed.

Jesus rose from the dead,  
demonstrating God's power over all  
evil. The ground was cultivated.  
Jesus planted the vision for a new  
world of peace among all people.  
He then empowered his people,  
like Boaz, like you, like me, to go  
live as God's Kingdom in this world.  
That is our resurrection hope!

I'll close Boaz's story this morning  
and introduce our communion  
offering with a vision of God's  
kingdom, an Easter resurrection  
vision of God's people living as  
image bearers of God. This was  
written by Boaz:

*I imagine a day, not far in the  
future, when we will witness a  
flourishing multi-tribal, multi-faith,  
multi-party democracy. But for that  
day to come each one of us  
whether male or female in our  
beautiful land must first find the part  
of him or herself that crosses  
borders. It means that each one of  
us should open our eyes to see  
beyond tribal, racial, and faith  
boundaries; open our minds to  
listen to the stories of our rival;  
open our hearts to feel each other's  
fears and hopes, and open our  
hands to work together across  
ethnic lines to build a new more  
inclusive and just one-united image  
and children of our Almighty God.*

— **Boaz Keibarak**