



Ruth 2:1-12

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

Naomi said to her, "Go ahead, my daughter."

3 So she went out, 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.

4 Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, "The LORD be with you!"

"The LORD bless you!" they answered.

5 Boaz asked the overseer of his harvesters, “Who does that young woman belong to?”

6 The overseer replied, “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.”

8 So Boaz said to Ruth, “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.”

10 At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She asked him, “Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?”

11 Boaz replied, “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.”

I love this time of year. The first week of October brings with it the realization that we are on a path that leads us to Christmas. And I do love stories that lead us to Christmas. But how can this story about Ruth and Boaz lead us to the manger?

The story of Ruth and Boaz actually has its beginnings in the 1st chapter of Ruth and we really should start there. Naomi was married to Elimelek and Elimelek was from Bethlehem. Now I can understand how one might come to think that Elimelek being from Bethlehem and Bethlehem being the birthplace of our Lord and Savior is just a coincidence. But when it comes to the Bible, I don't believe in coincidences, and while it is true that Naomi married into the family of Elimelek, it is also true that Ruth, her daughter-in-law married Boaz. And while I don't want to get too far ahead of myself, Ruth and Boaz had a son named Obed and Obed had a son named Jesse who was the father of King David. This puts this story right in the path of the lineage of Jesus. Like I said, when it comes to the Bible, I don't believe in coincidences.

Back to our story. There was a famine in Judah and Elimelek took Naomi and their two sons to Moab where he died, leaving Naomi a widow. Naomi's sons grew up and married Moabite women giving Naomi two Daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah. Sadly, Naomi's two sons passed away and leaving all three women widows and being a widow in a man's world was a very difficult thing for these

three women. Naomi realized that she needed to return to Judah if she was going to have any kind of life at all. So, she tells Orpah and Ruth that they should also get on with their lives and she gives them her blessings and her hope that they will find husbands to care for them.

Orpah is grateful and stays in Moab praying to find a good husband and a new life. However, Ruth refuses to leave her mother-in-law and tells Naomi,

“Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.

Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.”

Naomi reluctantly agrees to let Ruth accompany her even though she feels it is not in the best interest of Ruth. The two of them return to Bethlehem and it causes quite a stir when they show up. It is at this point that we find our scripture for today.

The Jews in the days of Naomi took seriously the mandate that widows were to be cared for. One of the ways that this was accomplished was the practice of looking the other way when harvesting grain. The harvesters would use sickles to harvest the wheat and barley. There was always a certain amount that did not

get harvested, intentionally or unintentionally. Widows would follow behind the harvesters and glean the remnants that had been missed and the widows could then take that grain and make bread or cakes with it or sell it in the market to make money to help sustain themselves. The owners of the fields would look the other way and by doing so they were meeting their obligation to help care for the widows in their community. It was an unspoken practice that was understood and appreciated by the widows.

Naomi knew that Boaz would do the right thing and allow Ruth to glean the remnants. After all, not only was this a common practice, the field belonged to Boaz who was a relative of Elimelek, so they were of the same clan. Furthermore, Boaz goes beyond the norm by making sure she is safe and letting her know that she is protected as long as she works in his field. It doesn't go unnoticed that Ruth has a strong work ethic and works all day with only a short break.

Just to round out the story, Naomi decides to sell the land that Elimelek had owned and makes a plan for Boaz to buy it. There are family matters that have to be addressed because Boaz is not Naomi's closest relative. There are bargains that have to be made and protocols that have to be followed, but in the end, Boaz does buy the property and by doing so also acquires Ruth as his wife. This also makes Boaz the son of Naomi by marriage.

The story of Ruth is one of courage, compassion, fortitude, strength, honor, family and resilience. Without the love and dedication that Ruth has for Naomi and without the compassion and grace exhibited by Boaz, this story could possibly have had a completely difference ending.

God does have a tendency to place the right people in our lives at the right time. But we don't always know the reasons or even recognize that He has done this. Even if it is for our own good, we don't like to feel like we have been manipulated. Still, when we look back, we see God's grace and His love moving people in and out of our lives for purposes that we can't begin to fathom. And yes, it can be wonderful. And yes, it can be painful. We are usually grateful for those wonderful relationships that we are able to develop but we have to check ourselves and remind ourselves that the relationships that become unbound are just as important to our development in God's eyes as the relationships we cherish. We need to be grateful for those relationships as well because those are the ones in which we grow the most.

So, let's look "Beyond the Harvest" to the places we can't see; the places where faith leads us; the places we haven't yet reached but know that God is sowing in us there for a reason. Places where God can use us to lift others; where God can use others to lift us; places where we can grow and be grateful for our dependence on our creator.

Ruth is more than a love story. Ruth is more than a story about family. It is a story about purpose. We see Naomi's plan as she tries to rebuild her family, both for Ruth's sake and her own. We see Ruth's plan to be utterly devoted to Naomi and to trust her in all things. We see Boaz's plan to balance the weights of injustice in his family and to make his family whole; to put the puzzle pieces back together so that lives are restored, and grace is seen as the tie that binds.

What we do not see, is God's plan until near the end of the story, and even then, we see only a shadow of that plan. It is in the 4th chapter of Ruth that we see the result of the union of Ruth and Boaz is a son that they name Obed. And Obed becomes the father of Jesse. And Jesse becomes the father of David. And with the birth of David, our story of Ruth seems to reach its conclusion. It is a wondrous thing that David is born, and I mentioned last week how much David loved God and God loved David. It seems like a perfect ending knowing that the union of Boaz and Ruth brings us the story of David which teaches us so many lessons, not the least of which is the grace and forgiving nature of God.

But that is not where this story ends. It is not the completion of the harvest.

There is still so much more to be gleaned and just because Naomi, Ruth and Boaz can't see it, it does not mean that it is not there. I want you to see how far this

harvest truly goes. I want you to see how this harvest stretches out to a place beyond our immediate comprehension.

We read in Matthew 1: 5-16

“Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth,

Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David.

David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah’s wife,

Solomon the father of Rehoboam,

Rehoboam the father of Abijah,

Abijah the father of Asa,

Asa the father of Jehoshaphat,

Jehoshaphat the father of Jehoram,

Jehoram the father of Uzziah,

Uzziah the father of Jotham,

Jotham the father of Ahaz,

Ahaz the father of Hezekiah,

Hezekiah the father of Manasseh,

Manasseh the father of Amon,

Amon the father of Josiah,

and Josiah the father of Jeconiah. That is, Jehoiachin; and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon.

After the exile to Babylon:

Jeconiah was the father of Shealtiel,

Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel,

Zerubbabel the father of Abihud,

Abihud the father of Eliakim,

Eliakim the father of Azor,

Azor the father of Zadok,

Zadok the father of Akim,

Akim the father of Elihud,

Elihud the father of Eleazar,

Eleazar the father of Matthan,

Matthan the father of Jacob,

and Jacob the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary, and Mary was the mother of Jesus who is called the Messiah.”

Our vision is so limited when we try to see what is “Beyond the Harvest.” There is a great deal of joy, pain, wonder, grace, love, forgiveness, passion, hate,

humiliation, triumph, death, sorrow, peace and harvesting; enough to fill a Bible. Ruth had no idea of what was to come by her gleaning in that field. She worked hard, did what was asked of her, relied on Naomi and the God that Naomi worshipped to bring her to where she needed to be to serve a purpose she was totally unaware of; to fulfill a plan that had been put in place before the creation of the earth; to do her part to fulfill a destiny that reached far beyond her harvest. She had no way of looking ahead to see that her lineage would include the Son of God; the savior of all mankind. Only God could see "Beyond the Harvest". We have the advantage of being able to look back and see how Ruth's gleaning in the fields of Boaz had a direct impact on all of humanity as God made a purpose, a path and a plan to establish a greater relationship to his children; a plan that would be formed into a new covenant.

Where are we in this legacy? I mean, after all Jesus has already been born, crucified, buried and raised. What is there left for us to do?

Christ came to complete the original harvest, the people of Israel but he also opened up new fields for harvest; the fields of the gentiles. And with those new fields came the new harvesters like Paul, Barnabas and Timothy; harvesters that would teach us how to collect this new crop of Christians under the new covenant; to bring them to a right relationship with God Almighty, author and finisher of our faith.

Jesus told His disciples in Matthew 9:37 **“The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few,”** meaning that they could not fathom the scale of the coming harvest. Their vision, like Ruth’s, was limited. They had no way to look beyond the harvest and see the enormity of it.

We can’t see beyond our own harvest. We do not know the ramifications of every seed that God has planted in and around us. But I do know this. That harvest is plentiful and there are not enough workers even today.

What is your role in the harvest? Do not be overwhelmed at the task at hand because God will provide the resources in our lives to bring that harvest in if we will only allow Him to work through us. We may not live to see the fruits of our harvest, but we can know that the fruits are there because we know that God is working in our lives to advance His kingdom. Like Ruth, we just need to get to work at what He has sent us to do and we need to trust that His vision can see **“Beyond the Harvest.”**

Amen