

Pastor has described the book of Ruth as a love story so I guess I get the part where we find out if there is “And they lived happily ever after!” This love story is a bit more complicated because it is set thousands of years ago when courtships and marriage laws were just different. As we discussed the book during our text study with Pastor and as you heard from Annie last week, there is a lot of strangeness that can draw us away from the true story. First, just a recap.

Naomi is from Bethlehem, married, with 2 sons.

They have to move to Moab due to a famine. Once there, the 2 sons marry, but then her husband and 2 sons die before children are born.

Eventually, Naomi, in despair with no hope, wanted to go back to her native country. She told her Moab daughter in laws to stay in Moab and get married again. One did, but Ruth chose to leave her native country to stay with Naomi and care for her.

We learned how “gleaning” of the fields was left for people like Naomi and Ruth who had no man to care for them and they needed food. She did this in the fields of Boaz, who was a rich man on Naomi’s husband’s side. He was very gracious to them.

So, Naomi tried to play matchmaker and essentially instructed Ruth to ask Boaz to marry her which was displayed in an ancient way on the threshing floor. That brings us up to today.

Boaz knew the “rules” and knew that he couldn’t just marry her. He had to go through the steps of a Levirate Marriage which we read about in Chapter 4. Last week, in Pastor’s message, she introduced the Hebrew word, Goel, which is translated as redeemer or kinsman redeemer. A Goel was “a close male relative who, according to ancient Israelite law, was legally obligated to protect, rescue, and restore vulnerable family members.” This was usually a brother of a deceased man and one of their primary duties was to provide an heir for a widow who had no children so that the dead man’s lineage

would continue on. Boaz knew that he could not marry Ruth until she had been offered to the next of kin.

So, as chapter 4 starts, it sounds a bit awkward as Boaz goes up to the gate, summons the elders, etc., but this is how the Levirate Marriage was described in Deuteronomy, Chapter 25. Usually this would be just a formality if there was a brother because if he didn't marry, he was scorned. This case was again more complicated as Ruth was a Moabite and a daughter in law of Naomi's. So, if any wanted to be the family redeemer for Naomi, they would have to marry an immigrant, but they would also inherit Naomi's land. There was initial interest in the land, but when Ruth came up as part of the deal, the next of kin decided to pass, so Boaz was granted the freedom to marry Ruth. In those days, taking off your sandals meant legalizing a transaction or land deal, so once Boaz did that, Ruth was his to take as his wife.

Boaz and Ruth then had a child, but also according to Levirate Marriage Law, "and the firstborn whom she bears shall succeed to the name of the deceased brother, so that his name may not be blotted out of Israel." So Ruth's son, was given to Naomi as her offspring, the geneology line was continued and eventually led to Jesus Christ. This is also significant because Boaz was Israelite, but Ruth was Gentile. This union shows that God is not only the God of the Jews, but also the God of the Gentiles. So, the next time you read Matthew 1: 1-17 which spells out the genealogy of Jesus, look for "Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of King David. And then 10 verses later, "and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, who bore Jesus, who is called the Messiah."

So, there was a happy ending and they all apparently "lived happily ever after" which has also allowed us to live with God's grace here on earth and with everlasting life in eternity.

The difficulty with a story like this and so many things in the Bible, is that we need to make our way through the weeds until we can see the true meaning, or as I was doing on Friday, pull out the weeds to see the beautiful flowers and plants!!! I found my plants and the thing we have weeded out of every chapter of Ruth is lovingkindness for Naomi as exemplified by Boaz and Ruth. Lovingkindness is the mindful practice of unconditional, unselfish kindness and goodwill. Ruth had to leave her home country, Boaz wasn't first on the list to marry Ruth so he was not obligated. No one had to do anything for Naomi, but they did. Naomi apparently **mattered** to them.

What does it mean to **matter** to another? How do we make sure that people feel **mattered**? I attended the Synod assembly this year as a guest. I attended one of the workshops because the title had caught my attention, "The Power of **Mattering** in a Biblical Context." I really enjoyed one of the speakers, Ellie Krug, who gives seminars on Gray Area thinking. It's how we "other" people. Some ways are obvious such as skin color, gender, and physical disability, but others are just the silly things like body type, hair color, types of clothes we wear, tattoos, etc. These types of diversity can set us apart, but God wants us to focus on **inclusion**, the extent that people feel they matter. Everyone here today wants to feel like they matter in this church, in their families, with their friends, and in the greater world. Sometimes, we feel like we belong, but we don't really matter. How can we make this happen? We can learn to connect with each other through our stories, laughter, crying. . .we must become familiar with each other. Unfortunately, our human minds tend to see differences more than similarities, but if we are aware of this, we can stop it and start making a difference. (I think Teagan may be coming to church in the next week or 2, making a time to practice letting Teagan know that

she has mattered in our church and not just belonged. This can be practiced by using her new name Teagan, asking her about her job, etc.)

One of the activities during Ellie Krug's seminar had to do with different identities in your life. She had about 20 different signs hung up around the room and you were to stand under which identity sign described you after 5 different questions. The first question asked "which identity did your parents emphasize to you when growing up". Some stood under ethnicity, skin color, gender, wealth or education. I stood under religious affiliation because we were very faithful ELCA Lutheran's and I remember dad saying, "Just don't marry a Catholic!" So, what did I do . . . I married a Catholic. . . but Mie has turned into an awesome ELCA Lutheran!! The questions continued and it was sad to see some standing under the identity signs of "never good enough", gender because it limited them as a female, or low socioeconomic status. However, the last question was "What identity would you like to be remembered for?" People could have chosen wealth, ethnicity, being LGBTQ, vocation, a veteran, religious status or political party affiliation, but they only chose one of 2: Family or Compassion. Those 2, out of about 20 identities we could have in life, were the only ones that seemed to mean anything in the end.

Our hearts are stronger than any "other."

"Other" fades away when someone is sick or dying.

We don't have to have power, position, or money to make a difference in the world and as with the characters in this story, we often don't know how the impact of a good deed will change the course of a life, a community, or the world. Ordinary people like us, can have huge, positive impacts. . . be part

of a new birth that might just flourish into something unimaginable, just because we act with a little lovingkindness.