

June 14, 2026 Sunday Sermon
Ruth 3: 1-18
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To start – I am preaching today as it was the day I could preach. Not the day where I read the reading and said, oh yeah I've got this one.

I'd love to be as clean and clear as Diane was several weeks ago.

No, I will say even now, I am still deeply struggling with the story of Ruth and Boaz. And if sermons are to be about spreading the good word of God through my personal translation. Well, we're in trouble. In my 21st century eyes Ruth has too many tones of the privilege of men and wealth.

The bible is made of many books. This is one, if I were to read this for my book group, I would have thrown across the room. I was fairly old before I realized I did not have to finish a book just because I started reading it. And I would have stopped reading Ruth. I've even been considering how this book of 4 chapters is pushing me in my own personal faith crisis.

What's interesting about me struggling with this story is that I talked about it quite a bit with Curtis and good friends of mine who do not struggle or even often think of God or being in relationship with God. They asked me to tell them the story of Ruth as they didn't know it. So I did. We got a good giggle as I did it in a drunk history form...a tv show where you get historians drunk and ask them to tell you their piece of history knowledge. I kept calling Boaz this dude.

The really funny part? My friend told me that the next day he was on a long car ride with friends, and asked them what they thought of the book of Ruth. And told them what I had told him. And there, in a carful of men who sing songs to children, they had a serious talk about what could the book of Ruth possibly mean? He came back and said, I think you should take your churches brownies, something sweet, this is tough.

But I said I would do this –.It would have been easier for me to bake brownies than write this – and I do NOT like to bake.

So when I sat down, last night, to finally try to put my thoughts together, in my own weird way, I did one of those open the bible and see what it says to me. Anyone do this? I know my sister Deanna does. Me – not so much. But I was reading stuff and for some reason I came across John 14:1 - Do not let your heart be troubled – believe in God – believe also in me.

So I took a deep breath.

O.K. here's the bible. Now, stop me when you think I've hit where the book of Ruth is located.

It's here my friends – so close to the beginning! Pastor once said in our preaching discussion that the reason we take time to read the old testament is that it prepares us, helps us, to understand how we got to the need for the new testament. Or that's my remembrance if not quite correctly what she said!

So you have Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth , 1st Samuel -Scholars place it at 500 BCE, which is 2,600 years ago...no matter how you count it – a long time ago. What does it mean to us??

Some scholars say it is historical fiction. Some say it is historical narrative in short story form.

One scholar wrote what, if this were a printed library book, I would consider the back book write up it, and that is this... WHAT HAPPENS WHEN RADICAL LOYALTY MEETS DANGEROUS COURAGE?

So – let's go back over the book of Ruth.

First – the story of Ruth is set in days when Judges ruled, meaning chaos and disobedience in Israel between conquest of the land and kingship. Not a great period for the people. The book of Judges is a commentary on human nature. It ends, verse 25: in those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes. Which means, It's in chaos -all the people did what was right in their own eyes...gang rape, murder, civil war...it was anarchy, human deprivation.

Turn the page – enter the story of Naomi and Ruth, a bit of a domestic story in chaos. A story of human love and acting divine love.

There is a word used in Ruth that needs translation. It is Hesad. Here's its definition from 2 theologians from Luther Seminary. Rolf Jacobson said - we don't have word in English for Hesad. It is the quality you have to have to be faithful in a covenant relationship. Of course God has this alone as God has capacity in character and power(ability.) Yet, Ruth and Naomi have Hesad towards each other. And when Boaz comes in, then the 3 together demonstrate the capacity to have a faithfulness in relationship. I don't quite get that.

So theologian Kathryn Schifferdecker said – Hesad is loving kindness, mercy, love, steadfast love, faithful love...It's love that expresses itself in action and is willing to do what is good for the other. It's not like romantic love.

Now – back to Ruth... a story in four acts...

Chapter 1 – opening act – you have loss and loyalty

First – there's famine in Bethlehem, which is odd as Bethlehem I believe means bread. And like immigrants everywhere throughout time, Naomi and her family leave Bethlehem to find food...they migrate to Moab. There Naomi's husband Elimelech dies, her two sons marry Moab women and then die without children. Naomi who had to leave her home due to famine has experienced only loss. So she tells her daughters in law - go back to your mother's house. I learned that in Ruth, the Hebrew uses all feminine verbs. Language is key. She asked "may the Lord deal kindly with you" which can be translated as, do Hesad to you....

Orpah cries bitterly – yet returns to her mother.

Ruth famously refuses – famous passage of where you go I will go. It's a vow - a loyalty oath from daughter in law to mother in law. Ruth shows Hesad to Naomi in unsensible way...human love enacts divine love.

But Naomi is bereft and wants to be called Mara – bitter. She feels the Lord has left her.

So – they go back to Bethlehem as the famine has lifted. And it's time for the Barley harvest.

Act 2 – Gleaning

Remember, it was a Torah laws...you don't harvest to edges, you leave edges to poor, includes: widows, orphans, foreigners or sojourners. It wasn't quite charity, it was justice, allowing people to provide for themselves. We could use a law like that.

God never speaks in Ruth, there is no burning bush...God's Hesad is shown through human love.

And there seem to be a lot of hints that God is working behind the scenes

Because Ruth just happens to choose Boaz' field. Boaz (which is a name of one of the pillars of temple) he was a man of integrity. The story shows God acting through his faithfulness to show Hesad to Ruth & Naomi ...he protects her from the other men in the field, shares his lunch, tells workers to pull out from their barley things so she can glean more...and she takes home 30 pounds, crazy big amount to glean.

Within this barley, Naomi recognizes God is still at work in her life, through the love and loyalty of human beings.

Act 3 today – we've reached a turning point in our story...

And it happens on the threshing floor...

Set the scene: the Barley & Wheat harvest is done – and they're having a party...celebrating and drinking...have worked really hard. During this time period, every 3 out of 10 years there would be a poor harvest, scarcity, and hunger...when a bumper crop came, that meant abundance and all could eat and they were directed in Deuteronomy that during such time they were to feast. Barley harvest is early summer, ...major harvest of year...if it's a good harvest it's gonna be a good party...and they had had a good harvest.

Naomi is scheming, for her and Ruth's survival....get yourself dolled up...wait til Boaz is drunk and lays down on the threshing floor...and you go and lay beside him and uncover his feet...maybe feet, maybe more R rated and not feet. One of Curtis' favorite Hebrew experts says it's written in a way one can't really say. Could even mean she was uncovered. In any case – there are sexual overtones...and Boaz is very careful to say you've gotta leave before dawn.

Now – this is why I struggled so with this story. A woman is put in a position to use herself with a man of wealth and power to save herself. And yet...

Naomi told Ruth HE will tell you what to do. In the story, RUTH tells Boaz what to do, calls him to his responsibility.

“Spread your cloak over us” means marriage – SHE proposes marriage!

Ruth reminds him of his duty as a Goel – next of kin, especially to one who has fallen on hard times.

Radical loyalty and dangerous courage.

Now, here's the thing about Boaz. He says to her - you showed Hesad to Naomi, now you're showing it to me - a single man, an older man, not the wealthiest of men – he says to Ruth bless you for choosing me. The Moabite, the immigrant saves him.

Boaz doesn't save her – they save each other. Hesad happens – find new life in each other

In a historical fiction, one would write “Love and faithfulness abound, as much as the piles of grain at the threshing floor, and blessings overflow into the lives of those who once were empty.”

Some say it's a story written as a lesson in 5th century BCE for there to be an inclusive attitude towards foreigners.

Some say it's a celebration between strong and resourceful women.

Some say it's about how to champion the outcast and oppressed people.

Some say it's a book about the power of faithfulness.

Or is it a book about from the depths of despair emerges hope, growth and renewal?

How do the themes of loyalty, kindness, and God's providence ring through?

There is no overt miracle.

No direct divine speech.

No actual talking about God.

Just a peek into seeing how God acts through the ordinary, everyday faithfulness of human beings.

This story is not over – we have one more short, yet important chapter next week....

A good story gives you something to think about. What will you think about with this story?

Amen.