

Good Morning! Today we continue to read the book of Ruth. While I am sure I have heard the story of Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz many times, I felt like I was reading it for the first time.

In case you need a refresher, as I did, Naomi is Ruth's mother-in-law. Ruth's husband, Naomi's son, passed away after they had been married for about 10 years. This left Ruth a widow.

As Pastor Kris discussed last week, Ruth is a book all about how hesed—the steadfast, unending love of God—speaks to us, animates us and shapes us throughout our lives. Chapter 1 started out by sharing the story of Ruth remaining with her mother-in-law, the loyalty Ruth demonstrated.

Today, we move into Chapter 2. Ruth and Naomi begin to navigate their new life together. For Ruth and Naomi, two widows living in ancient Bethlehem, life was a daily struggle for survival. Because ancient Near Eastern societies were strictly patriarchal, women without husbands or sons lacked legal standing, property rights, and economic security. Together, they faced severe marginalization, extreme poverty, and the looming threat of starvation. Because the culture offered them no systemic support, their survival depended entirely on their mutual devotion.

Ruth's refusal to abandon her mother-in-law was a counter-cultural act of immense sacrifice. By leaving her own homeland (Moab) to follow Naomi back to Bethlehem, Ruth traded potential security in her native country for a life of poverty and uncertainty as an immigrant.

At the beginning of chapter two, Ruth and Naomi are simply two vulnerable women trying to survive.

Naomi has lost her husband.

Ruth has lost her husband.

They have left everything familiar behind and returned to Bethlehem with no land to farm, no income, no security, and no guarantee that anyone will help them.

The future is uncertain.

And if we're honest, many of us know what that feels like.

Farmers know what it feels like to face uncertainty. You can do everything right and still wonder if the rain will come. You can plant the seed but cannot control the weather. Markets rise and fall. Equipment breaks. Circumstances change.

Life often feels more uncertain than we would like.

That is where Ruth and Naomi find themselves.

So Ruth does something courageous.

She goes out to glean.

Now, gleaning was part of God's **law** for Israel. In ancient Israel, landowners were **commanded by law** to leave the edges of their fields unharvested and not to go over the stalks a second time. **This was a mandated welfare system for the poor, the widow, and the foreigner.** Leviticus 19 shows us that God's law explicitly charged landowners with leaving leftover crops at the edges of their fields for the most vulnerable members of their communities. Those who picked up the food were most often elderly and widowed individuals who didn't have another way to provide for themselves.

It was God's way of building compassion directly into the economy.

The vulnerable could gather food with dignity.

But notice something important.

Gleaning still required courage.

Ruth was a widow.

She was poor.

She was a foreigner.

She had no guarantee of welcome.

Every step she took into that field required trust.

She was completely dependent on the kindness of strangers.

Hope is the belief that a better future is possible and the confidence to keep moving toward it, even when circumstances are uncertain. Hope gives us the strength to persevere, find a path forward, and trust that God is still at work.

In Ruth's story, hope is evident in both Ruth and Naomi. Despite loss and uncertainty, they refused to give up. Together they sought a way forward, and through courage, determination, and God's provision through Boaz, they discovered that even in difficult seasons, new possibilities can emerge. Hope did not erase their struggles, but it gave them the strength to take the next faithful step.

I love this story for so many reasons. The strength and determination by two women that had their backs against the wall. I am a woman, a wife, a mother, a daughter. I am Ruth. My father, grandfather, great grandfather and husband are farmers. They are Boaz. When I read today's story, I can't help but look for myself in the story...try putting myself into the shoes of those in the story...and wondering if I could do the things that these folks did. Could I stand by my mother-in-law should Jeff pass away unexpectedly? Would I be able to move forward to continue to provide for my family despite the insurmountable loss of my husband? I don't really know – but I think that I would look to Ruth for guidance.

And Boaz – Boaz goes far beyond the bare requirements of the law. He ensures Ruth's safety, invites her to eat with his workers, and purposely instructs his reapers to drop extra grain for her to gather

As I read this passage, I couldn't help but think about the many stories we hear in rural communities of farmers helping farmers.

When a family faces illness and harvest still needs to happen, neighbors show up.

When equipment breaks down, somebody brings a tractor.

When a barn burns, people gather lumber.

When drought or disaster strikes, communities organize benefit meals and fundraisers.

Nobody writes a headline about it. Most of the time it doesn't make the evening news.

But it happens.

And when it does, we see something of Boaz in those moments.

Because Boaz could have done the minimum required by law.

Instead, he went beyond the minimum.

He noticed Ruth.

He welcomed her.

He protected her.

He instructed his workers to leave extra grain behind for her.

He used his position and resources to create safety for someone who had none.

That is not merely generosity.

That is grace.

I wonder what gleaning looks like in 2026.

Most of us don't leave grain standing at the edge of our fields anymore.

But perhaps the principle still remains.

Maybe gleaning today looks like the retired farmer who helps a younger producer get started.

Maybe it looks like the neighbor who clears a driveway after a snowstorm.

Maybe it looks like sharing equipment, lending expertise, making a phone call, delivering a meal, or simply noticing someone who is struggling.

Perhaps gleaning today means intentionally leaving room in our lives for generosity.

Leaving time.

Leaving resources.

Leaving compassion.

Leaving space for someone who needs help.

In a culture that often says, "Take everything you can get," God says, "Leave some for your neighbor."

What strikes me most about this story is that Ruth does not yet know God's plan.

She simply takes the next faithful step.

And Boaz does not know how important his kindness will become.

He simply chooses to do the right thing.

Yet God is already at work through both of them.

That may be one of the most comforting truths for us.

Most of the time we do not see the whole picture either.

We don't know how God is working through a meal delivered to a grieving family.

We don't know how God is working through a word of encouragement.

We don't know how God is working through an act of generosity.

We don't know what future blessing may grow from seeds we plant today.

But God does.

The Lutheran tradition reminds us that God often comes hidden in ordinary places.

Not only in grand miracles.

But in daily bread.

In neighbors.

In work.

In fields.

In communities.

In people caring for one another.

Ruth walked into a field looking for grain.

Instead, she found grace.

And Naomi, who had returned home believing she had nothing left, began to discover that God had not abandoned her after all.

The same God who watched over Ruth and Naomi continues to work among us.

Through ordinary people.

Through ordinary acts of kindness.

Through communities that refuse to let vulnerable people stand alone.

Through neighbors helping neighbors.

Through farmers helping farmers.

Through grace found along the edge of the field.