

Sermon: 'Loving Ending – Lasting Legacy'

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LESSON: Ruth 4:1-22

Just like Eastenders or Coronation Street or The Archers, last week our look at Ruth ended on a cliff hanger!

In chapter one,
after a terrible time in Moab,
Naomi has come back home to Bethlehem as a widow who has also lost her two sons and there seems little hope for her or for her daughter-in-law Ruth who has so loyally come back with her.

But then in the harvest fields,
we read about this in chapter two,
Ruth meets Boaz,
romance begins to blossom.

In chapter three the scheming Naomi sends Ruth to go to Boaz at night and virtually forces his hand to promise to take on his responsibilities as the "*kinsman redeemer*,"

the nearest relative who has an obligation to marry, or at least take in, a relative who is a widow.

But Boaz doesn't mind at all for he has fallen for Ruth hook, line and sinker.

There is however just one barrier in the way,
another relative is in fact,
under Jewish Law,
closer to Naomi and therefore the one who has the obligation to take on her and her daughter in law and thus keep her dead son's hereditary line alive,
so what's going to happen?

Well we had wise words from Naomi at the end of chapter three,
"Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens,"
and that is where we start this morning as we move to chapter four.

Boaz goes up to the gate and waits.

Note here that Boaz has had a disturbed night and was probably very tired, but at the end of it he had promised Ruth that he would sort things out and now he gets right on with it.

He could have left it for a day or two,
but no,

he walks up the hill to Bethlehem and acts quickly.

Yes of course he wanted the matter sorted out himself but I am sure he was also very aware of the agony of emotions Ruth must have felt as she waited to see if she was to spend the rest of her days with the man she loved or with a man she had never met.

Two lessons to learn here.

The first is that if we say we are going to do something we should do it.

How many times have you said to someone,

“Oh you must come for a meal sometime”,

or

“We must get together soon” and then just left it.

That undermines friendship and trust.

Don't just speak pleasantries for the sake of it,

either keep quiet or act upon your promise.

Second, notice the terrible place of women in those days,
almost chattels to be bought and sold along with the land.

Now all this happened a thousand years before the time of Jesus,

but this lowly status of women is something which was still continuing in

New Testament times and in fact still continues in many Middle Eastern
cultures today,

and I think we need to realise that it is from this very primitive context that
the teaching in the New Testament about women not being able to preach or
lead in Church is derived,

and therefore be very wary of it.

The life and ministry of Jesus liberated women,

they then went on to play a key role in the life of the early Church.

That should have been the beginning of an increasing role and a developing
liberation,

it is a tragedy that in many Churches it did not,

and in fact in our own Methodist Church the change has only come in my
lifetime.

I therefore have to say that I believe our friends in the Roman Catholic

Church and some of the very Conservative Anglican and Protestant

Churches have not given sufficient weight to both this narrow context and
how Jesus confronted it.

However, to get back to the story,

it was not that big a town and eventually virtually everyone would come
through the gate,

so eventually the *"kinsman redeemer"* Boaz is looking for comes.

Here in this translation we are using Boaz calls him *"my friend,"*

but the commentaries tell us a better translation would be *"Mr So and So."*

This man has not acted honourably,

he is not worthy of a name in the narrative.

But although this character does not come out well, in contrast Boaz does.

He treats the man properly as the law demands - he is honourable.
He gets the ten witnesses that the law demands - he is careful.
He explains the law to this Mr So and So and sets out the truth of the case,
- he is honest.

Now here it all gets pretty complicated,
in fact one Bible Commentary says here that,
I quote,
"There are many obscurities in these verses and an interested reader should
consult a larger commentary."
Well I have consulted any number of larger commentaries and as I
understand it this,
put simply,
is the situation.

It seems likely that when he went to Moab to avoid the famine Naomi's late husband,
Elimelech, sold the use of the land.

The "*kinsman redeemer*" would therefore eventually get the land back when
the 50 year Jubilee came when all land reverted to the original owner,
at that stage it would come to his family.

Before that however he could, if he wanted to, buy back the use of the land,
but the problem was that if he did that he also got the people with it,
the land plus Naomi and her daughter in law Ruth!

They would be an expense,
but also if Ruth had a child the land would move out of the family of the
"*kinsman redeemer*" and back into the family of Elimelech.

So this poor man would have paid out the money,
had the cost of maintaining the two women,
and then lost the land anyway!

No wonder he wasn't interested.

But Boaz was,
why?

Partly because he was a holy and good and compassionate man,
but more importantly because he loved Ruth.

Just this week we were watching the film,

"Bridget Jones, the Edge of Reason."

Bridget Jones, played by Renee Zellweger,
is a totally scatty television presenter who is a bit overweight and who is torn
between two men who are after her.

One is played by Hugh Grant and he is a charming scoundrel whose only
concern it to get her into bed.

The other is a steady but perhaps more boring character played by the
ever handsome Colin Firth,

Mr Darcy to most of us.

He loves Bridget but finds it hard to show it.

Through her total naivety and foolishness Bridget Jones has drugs planted on her and ends up in a far eastern jail charged with drug smuggling.

The Hugh Grant character sees her arrested but gets on the plane home anyway,

leaving her to sort out her own problems.

The Colin Firth character moves heaven and earth to get her released.

The difference between the two men who both want Bridget Jones is that one loves her and the other does not.

It's the same here,

Mr So and So wanted the land but not her,

Boaz wanted her and the land was incidental.

So the stage is set for that which Ruth's mother in law Naomi had dreamed of. she had left Bethlehem with a husband and sons and come back,

as she puts it, "*empty.*"

Now at last she has happiness,

the ancestral line of her husband and son has been restored,

her "*kinsman redeemer*" is a good man who happily is also very rich

and the daughter in law she loves has found delight in a loving husband

and later a child,

verses 16 and 17,

verses 16 /17

The name "Obed" meant "Servant of Yahweh,"

and this young baby,

born to a Moabite foreigner,

was to be the grandfather of the greatest ever King of Israel,

King David.

What joy for Naomi,

her dreams and longings have come true!

What joy for Boaz,

in his old age he has a beautiful woman to love him and give him a child.

What joy for Ruth,

she had been so very faithful and she has been rewarded.

And what joy for you,

and what joy for me,

for that child born to Ruth was to stand in the ancestral line of a still greater King.

For Boaz and Ruth and the baby Obed are all mentioned in Matthew Chapter One,

out of that lineage came Jesus Christ,

the one who is the "*kinsman redeemer*" of us all.

Jesus Christ has the will to redeem you!

Just as Boaz loved Ruth so wanted to redeem her, so Jesus loves each person

here this morning,
He wants to redeem you,
to redeem you from all from your past that holds you,
to redeem you from that broken situation which entraps you,
to redeem you from the power of sin to destroy you,
Jesus loves you and has the will to redeem you.

Then Jesus Christ has the means to redeem you!
It may have been that Boaz might have wanted to redeem Ruth but not had
the means to do it,
but because he was a rich man and had the resources he was able to do it.
Jesus possessed all the riches of heaven and the precious jewel of the love of
His Father God,
yet He stepped from all that to redeem you and shower upon you the
resources of His love,
Jesus loves you and has the means to redeem you.

Then Jesus Christ has the determination to redeem you!
Boaz could have known all about Ruth,
he could have had all the resources to redeem her and yet chosen to do
nothing,
but love made him determined to win her.
Jesus is determined to redeem you,
so determined in fact that He went to a cross for love of you,
so determined that He stayed on that cross right to the end that He might win
you.
"Oh to see my name,
written in the wounds,
For through your suffering I am free.
What a love! What a cost!
We stand forgiven at the cross."

So after four weeks we finish the Book of Ruth,
what a wonderful love story,
but no love story is more wonderful than the story of the love of Jesus for me
and for you,
may you make room in your hearts for His love this morning.