

Worship Outline for September 20, 2020
Risking Redemption: Ruth 2

COUNTDOWN

OPENING SEQUENCE

ONLINE GREETER: Sherrie Denzene

OPENING VERSE: Romans 12:3 (CEB)

Because of the grace that God gave me, I can say to each one of you: don't think of yourself more highly than you ought to think. Instead, be reasonable since God has measured out a portion of faith to each one of you.

PRELUDE

Diane Gronewold

OPENING PRAYER

God of Ruth and Naomi, of hope in bitterness, harvest in hunger, life in death, we offer our prayers of blessing on the feet and lives of all people. You, Lord, are born in our resistance to injustice and you invite us to take the risk of being redeemed. Invite us into solidarity as we worship you, and as you lead us to life and justice. Amen.

SONG FROM BRIAN

All The Poor and Powerless

CCLI #5881130 | Leslie Jordan and David Leonard © 2011

All the poor and powerless
All the lost and lonely
All the thieves will come confess
And know that You are holy
And know that You are holy

And all will sing out hallelujah
And we will cry out hallelujah

All the hearts who are content
And all who feel unworthy
And all who hurt with nothing left

Will know that You are holy

Shout it, go on and scream it
From the mountains
Go on and tell it to the masses
That God is love

We will sing out hallelujah
And we will cry out hallelujah
We will sing out hallelujah
And shout yeah

OFFERING AND PRAYER OF DEDICATION (Good Sam, Building, General)

READING OF RUTH 2 (CEB)

Harris with text/images video

Now Naomi had a respected relative, a man of worth, through her husband from the family of Elimelech. His name was Boaz. Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field so that I may glean among the ears of grain behind someone in whose eyes I might find favor."

Naomi replied to her, "Go, my daughter." So she went; she arrived and she gleaned in the field behind the harvesters. By chance, it happened to be the portion of the field that belonged to Boaz, who was from the family of Elimelech.

Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem. He said to the harvesters, "May the Lord be with you."

And they said to him, "May the Lord bless you."

Boaz said to his young man, the one who was overseeing the harvesters, "To whom does this young woman belong?"

The young man who was overseeing the harvesters answered, "She's a young Moabite woman, the one who returned with Naomi from the territory of Moab. She said, 'Please let me glean so that I might gather up grain from among the bundles behind the harvesters.' She arrived and has been on her feet from the morning until now, and has sat down for only a moment."

Boaz said to Ruth, "Haven't you understood, my daughter? Don't go glean in another field; don't go anywhere else. Instead, stay here with my young women. Keep your eyes on the field that they are harvesting and go along after them. I've ordered the young men not to assault you. Whenever you are thirsty, go to the jugs and drink from what the young men have filled."

Then she bowed down, face to the ground, and replied to him, "How is it that I've found favor in your eyes, that you notice me? I'm an immigrant." Boaz responded to her, "Everything that you did for your mother-in-law after your husband's death has been reported fully to me: how you left behind your father, your mother, and the land of your birth, and came to a people you hadn't known beforehand. May the Lord reward you for your deed. May you receive a rich reward from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you've come to seek refuge." She said, "May I continue to find favor in your eyes, sir, because you've comforted me and because you've spoken kindly to your female servant—even though I'm not one of your female servants."

At mealtime Boaz said to her, "Come over here, eat some of the bread, and dip your piece in the vinegar." She sat alongside the harvesters, and he served roasted grain to her. She ate, was satisfied, and had leftovers. Then she got up to glean.

Boaz ordered his young men, "Let her glean between the bundles, and don't humiliate her. Also, pull out some from the bales for her and leave them behind for her to glean. And don't scold her."

So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she threshed what she had gleaned; it was about an ephah of barley.

She picked it up and went into town. Her mother-in-law saw what she had gleaned. She brought out what she had left over after eating her fill and gave it to her. Her mother-in-law said to her, "Where did you glean today? Where did you work? May the one who noticed you be blessed."

She told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked and said, "The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz."

Naomi replied to her daughter-in-law, "May he be blessed by the Lord, who hasn't abandoned his faithfulness with the living or with the dead." Naomi said to her, "The man is one of our close relatives; he's one of our redeemers."

Ruth the Moabite replied, "Furthermore, he said to me, 'Stay with my workers until they've finished all of my harvest.'"

Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, "It's good, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, so that men don't assault you in another field."

Thus she stayed with Boaz's young women, gleaning until the completion of the barley and wheat harvests. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

SPECIAL MUSIC

Bridge Over Troubled Water

Paul Simon (adapt. Dale Brown)

Dale Brown and Diane Gronewold

When you're weary, feelin' small,
When tears are in your eyes,
I'll dry them all;
I'm on your side.
Oh, when times get rough
And friends just can't be found,
Like a Bridge Over Troubled Water
I will lay me down.
Like a Bridge Over Troubled Water
I will lay me down.

When you're down and out,
When you're on the street,
When evening falls so hard
I will comfort you.
I'll take your part.
Oh, when darkness comes
And pain is all around,
Like a Bridge Over Troubled Water
I will lay me down.
Like a Bridge Over Troubled Water
I will lay me down.

When you seek the Lord
Put your trust in him,
His words will be your guide.
His love will light your way.
He took your place.
Oh, at Calvary

Just put your trust in him and
Like a Bridge Over Troubled Water
He will ease your mind.
Like a Bridge Over Troubled Water
He will ease your mind.

SERMON

Rachael

Good morning, dear ones. I am so grateful for this opportunity, once again, to come together in worship. May we experience here the grace and peace of God, the Creator, Christ, and Holy Spirit.

Today we continue our reading of the Book of Ruth with chapter 2. If you missed worship last week, I encourage you to go back and watch the service, or at least to take a read through chapter one of Ruth when you have some time. Also, remember that for this series, we are staying in the Scripture and asking lots of questions that arise. Then, we are leaving it to you to ponder and pray about those questions and to think about what this story might be offering you today.

Here's a quick recap to get us all on the same page: Naomi and Elimelech were a Hebrew couple living in southern Israel during a time when there was both corrupt leadership and a severe food shortage. They decided to take their two sons and relocate to Moab, on the other side of the Dead Sea, where their sons grew up and married Moabite women. When Naomi's husband and sons died, and she learned that the famine in Israel had ended, she headed back to Bethlehem. Her daughter-in-law Ruth saw her loneliness and grief and chose to travel back with her, even though Moabites were despised and treated without dignity in Israel. Last week, we left off in the story just as Ruth and Naomi had arrived in Bethlehem. Naomi described her grief and anguish as bitterness. The two women began the work of settling in, up against all the reasons this life they were building would never work. They were women, one a Moabite, widows, and Naomi had been gone a very long time. This is where we pick up the story today in chapter 2.

If Ruth and Naomi are going to survive as widows in Bethlehem, they will need to find a way to provide for themselves. Immediately, Ruth shows Naomi that her decision to stay at her mother-in-law's side was neither naive nor superficial. Ruth genuinely intends to care and provide for Naomi in her grief and as she ages. Scholar Renita Weems writes of the friendship between these women, "Ruth was not discouraged by Naomi's grief. Ruth had made a commitment to Naomi, a commitment to look beyond her friend's bitterness and see her loneliness. Ruth had promised, back on the plains of Moab, to be Naomi's friend if Naomi wanted, to be a daughter when Naomi needed. But Naomi, consumed with grief over her loss

and despair about her future, was unable to reciprocate the friendship. to the young woman's credit, Ruth did not deny Naomi the right to grieve."

And so it is Ruth who makes the suggestion that she will go out and find a field where she can follow behind the hired harvesters and gather up (or glean) what they have passed over or left behind. This will be labor intensive, but Ruth is willing to do what it takes.

As it turns out, the story goes, Ruth finds her way to gleaning in a field owned by a man named Boaz, who just happens to be both a relative of Naomi's late husband Elimelech AND a man of standing, or status, or good reputation in Bethlehem. Do you believe in coincidences? Or is there something more at work here? In her commentary on Ruth, Kathleen Robertson Farmer writes, "Providence, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. While the narrator doesn't specifically say that Ruth's "happening" to find Boaz's field was a part of God's plan, [you] may conclude that such happenings only seem accidental to human eyes. This chapter in Ruth raises the question of the relationship between divine plans and human agency."

In this book, both Boaz and Ruth are ultimately described with the same Hebrew adjective, *chayil*, which can be translated as worthy, honorable, or of valor. We are introduced to Boaz with this word to give us the heads up that he is a man of good character, of valor. Later when this word is used to describe Ruth, well we already knew that about her from the beginning, didn't we? The repetitive use of this same adjective tells us that Boaz and Ruth will be evenly matched...but that's another part of the story for another day. Let's not get ahead of ourselves!

When Boaz arrives from town to check in on the harvesting of his fields, he notices Ruth and asks his foreman to come tell him who she is. This is another example of a moment that might pass us by if we don't pause to ask a few questions! What was it about Ruth that caught Boaz's attention? Was her race or ethnicity obviously different, a Moabite woman trailing along in the field behind the Israelite women? Did he notice her simply because she was working behind the rest, wondering why she was not keeping up with the other workers? Or was he the kind of CEO who cared about his employees and knew them well enough to notice when someone new was in the group?

The foreman tells Boaz who Ruth is and that she has asked permission to glean in the field behind the women working the barley harvest and has then worked tirelessly all day to gather barley.

Boaz greets Ruth personally and invites her to stay in his field, rather than gleaning a little bit here and there from different fields, which may have been more customary. He gives her permission to glean, to befriend the women who work as harvesters in his field, and to share their water when she is thirsty.

Also importantly, he gives us a deeper glimpse into how dangerous Ruth's reality likely was in her time and place as a widowed woman going alone to the field to work. Boaz says that he has

instructed the men who work for him not to touch her. Which raises another question, was Boaz already interested in Ruth romantically? Was he, just as likely, a kind and gracious man who recognized how vulnerable she was and was willing to use his status and authority to make the way safer for her? Even more compelling, did he offer this same protection and empowerment to all the women who worked as harvesters in his fields?

His graciousness and generosity continues, as he acknowledges that he knows what she has done for Naomi. He recognizes her loyalty, faithfulness, and humility. He prays for God to bless her, a Moabite woman, and then welcomes her to eat at his table and dip her bread in the same bowl as the others - not treating her with the suspicion foreigners often received in Israel, and not keeping her separate from the community because of her race, gender, or status as a widow (and a poor widow at that). And when she goes back out to work, aware that she doesn't really know what she is doing, he even asks his men to leave some of the good stuff behind for her to gather up. He does not relegate her to the undesired crops or the leftovers that no one else wanted.

We might ask ourselves what it looks like to offer genuine hospitality to others? To go above and beyond our suspicions or fears, to step outside of the way things are or the way things should be or the way things have to be, to ensure that every person we meet is treated with dignity, compassion, and honor? What Boaz saw when he looked at Ruth was her whole story, her humanity, all that had brought her to this present moment where she was poor and alone, a woman and an immigrant, out of her comfort zone and not playing by the rules. Boaz would have been within his right to demand that she leave his field, or to give her a short time to glean the sub-par barley and send her away. The rules of his culture and time did not require him to speak to her or feed her or protect her. And yet, Boaz chose in that moment not only to tolerate her or to be nice to her, but to honor her and offer abundant hospitality and overwhelming generosity. And he did this in public view, where his behavior was also leadership, showing others what this kind of living as a believer in God looked like.

That evening, Ruth returns to Naomi with an abundance of food for their household and an unbelievable story about the kindness shown to her by the field owner. When Naomi learns that it was Boaz, she rejoices that someone of her husband's family is showing such kindness to her new family. She encourages Ruth to continue working in Boaz's field, where she will be safe. And, meanwhile, an idea is beginning to take shape for Naomi - perhaps the first glimmer of hope her bitter soul has felt in a long time...

What are your takeaways from this second chapter of Ruth? This week I hope you'll ponder a bit more about how God is involved in the happenings of the world, and where we must take responsibility for our human actions, reactions, and interactions. Also, perhaps spend some of your wondering this week on where God is calling you to offer abundant kindness to someone you might have otherwise ignored or dismissed?

May God bless our wonderings. Amen.

HYMN

Leaning on the Everlasting Arms

What a fellowship, what a joy divine
Leaning on the everlasting arms
What a blessedness, what a peace is mine
Leaning on the everlasting arms

Leaning, leaning
Safe and secure from all alarms
Leaning, leaning
Leaning on the everlasting arms

O how sweet to walk in this pilgrim way
Leaning on the everlasting arms
O how bright the path grows from day to
day
Leaning on the everlasting arms

Leaning, leaning
Safe and secure from all alarms
Leaning, leaning
Leaning on the everlasting arms

PASTORAL PRAYER

THE LORD'S PRAYER

SONG: This Little Light, Men's Quartet

BENEDICTION

Wednesday Drive In Service

POSTLUDE