

Worship Outline for October 4, 2020
Risking Redemption: Ruth 4

COUNTDOWN

OPENING SEQUENCE

ONLINE GREETER: *Marna McComb*

OPENING VERSE: Romans 12:15-17 (CEB)

Be happy with those who are happy, and cry with those who are crying. Consider everyone as equal, and don't think that you're better than anyone else. Instead, associate with people who have no status. Don't think that you're so smart. Don't pay back anyone for their evil actions with evil actions, but show respect for what everyone else believes is good.

PRELUDE

Trumpet Tune

Robert Lau

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.

HYMN

Morning Has Broken

UMH #145

Morning has broken like the first morning
Blackbird has spoken like the first bird
Praise for the singing
Praise for the morning
Praise for them springing fresh from the Word

Mine is the sunlight
Mine is the morning
Born of the one light
Eden saw play
Praise with elation
Praise every morning
God's recreation of the new day

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

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

READING OF RUTH 4 (CEB)

Harris with text/images video

Meanwhile, Boaz went up to the gate and sat down there. Just then, the redeemer about whom Boaz had spoken was passing by. He said, "Sir, come over here and sit down." So he turned aside and sat down. Then he took ten men from the town's elders and said, "Sit down here." And they sat down.

Boaz said to the redeemer, "Naomi, who has returned from the field of Moab, is selling the portion of the field that belonged to our brother Elimelech. I thought that I should let you know and say, 'Buy it, in the presence of those sitting here and in the presence of the elders of my people.' If you will redeem it, redeem it; but if you won't redeem it, tell me so that I may know. There isn't anyone to redeem it except you, and I'm next in line after you."

He replied, "I will redeem it." Then Boaz said, "On the day when you buy the field from Naomi, you also buy Ruth the Moabite, the wife of the dead man, in order to preserve the dead man's name for his inheritance." But the redeemer replied, "Then I can't redeem it for myself, without risking damage to my own inheritance. Redeem it for yourself. You can have my right of redemption, because I'm unable to act as redeemer."

In Israel, in former times, this was the practice regarding redemption and exchange to confirm any such matter: a man would take off his sandal and give it to the other person. This was the process of making a transaction binding in Israel. Then the redeemer said to Boaz, "Buy it for yourself," and he took off his sandal.

Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, "Today you are witnesses that I've bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon. And also Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, I've bought to be my wife, to preserve the dead man's name for his inheritance so that the name of the dead man might not be cut off from his brothers or from the gate of his hometown—today you are witnesses."

Then all the people who were at the gate and the elders said, "We are witnesses. May the Lord grant that the woman who is coming into your household be like Rachel and like Leah, both of whom built up the house of Israel. May you be fertile in Ephrathah and may you preserve a name in Bethlehem. And may your household be like the household of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah—through the children that the Lord will give you from this young woman."

So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. He was intimate with her, the Lord let her become pregnant, and she gave birth to a son. The women said to Naomi, "May the Lord be blessed, who today hasn't left you without a redeemer. May his name be proclaimed in Israel. He will restore your life and sustain you in your old age. Your daughter-in-law who loves you has given birth to him. She's better for you than seven sons." Naomi took the child and held him to her breast, and she became his guardian.

The neighborhood women gave him a name, saying, "A son has been born to Naomi." They called his name Obed. He became Jesse's father and David's grandfather.

These are the generations of Perez: Perez became the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab, Amminadab the father of Nahshon, Nahshon the father of Salmon, Salmon the father of Boaz, Boaz the father of Obed, Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David.

SPECIAL MUSIC

Joy!

Cassidy, Jocelyn, Emma, and Champlin Park HS students

SERMON

Rachael

Ruth 4: Risking Redemption

And just like that, we've read the entire book of Ruth together! Today as we close our series, we do not come to the end of Ruth's story. Her life and her story would continue on after the events of this chapter, after our interest in her moves on to interest in other stories. Today we leave Ruth at the beginning of her next new adventure, and we see how her story is a significant piece of our own story - how the redemption experienced by Naomi and Ruth is linked to the redemption of all people.

If you have not been with us over the month of September, I do encourage you to go back and take a look at the worship services and the themes that have been developing as we read about Ruth, Naomi, Orpah, and Boaz. Also, a reminder, we are reading closely together, considering this story and asking all the questions it raises up in us as we read. You won't get the answers here - and you won't hear me drawing Ruth into the many debates and disagreements of our time. Instead, I invite you to hold all these questions, ponder and pray, consider what God might be speaking to you in your life today through the reading of Ruth.

The first thing that jumps out at us as chapter 4 begins is how much we really do not know or understand about the customs in Bethlehem at the time Ruth was living there. Why did she go lay at Boaz's feet in the last chapter? Was that chapter just one innuendo after another, or were there some customs we cannot understand because we are so far removed from them? Today, we begin with another such custom being described in more detail. Boaz goes to the town gate to work out a negotiation with another relative of Elimelech.

Who will redeem Elimelech's widow and his son's widow? And, we learn something interesting here, don't we? Naomi had something more than we previously knew about! Up to this point, we've been led to believe that Naomi was completely helpless with nothing to her name. But now, when Boaz goes to the gate to negotiate, we learn that when her husband died, Naomi inherited his field! She is a landowner, at least for now.

So why don't Naomi and Ruth make entrepreneurs of themselves as landowners? Why appeal to Boaz in the first place? Are the laws of this patriarchal society restrictive in a way that won't allow Naomi and Ruth to build their own small business by running the crop production of their field? Are they not allowed to live on Elimelech's land unless it has been claimed by a male redeemer? In fact, other texts from the time, even other stories in the Bible seem to suggest that women could own property, especially if they inherited it as widows. Commentator Kathleen Robertson Farmer notes that "it is highly unlikely that a piece of arable land would have been left unclaimed and unused during the ten years that Elimelech and his family stayed in Moab. So it is conceivable that the task of buying or redeeming the land would include regaining control of it from someone who had held it in Naomi's absence."

Do these seemingly picky details really matter to the story? Maybe, or maybe not. I think these questions help us get to the heart of the primary theme we've been exploring throughout the whole book: redemption. What does it mean to redeem or to be redeemed? What risks were Naomi and Ruth, and even Boaz, willing to take to find redemption for their stories?

So let's get back to the gate. Boaz is following cultural protocols, and maybe legal requirements when he meets with the closest relative to figure out which one of them will redeem Naomi and Ruth. When Boaz presents the land as the offer, the other man is interested, isn't he? Yes! He wants to claim Elimelech's land. He will buy it and add it to his wealth.

Boaz has this man right where he wants him, when he names the fine print. If you buy the land, you also agree to take on Ruth, the widow of Naomi's son who would have been the rightful heir to this property.

Is this moment in the story as uncomfortable for you as it is for me? Boaz tells this other potential redeemer that if he buys the land, he also buys the human being, Ruth the Moabite. Now, I recognize that Boaz seems to genuinely care about Ruth. But when he articulates this fine print of the deal in verses 5-6, he sinks into the norms of the time: women are property to be bought and sold, claimed and owned as possessions.

Think back to chapter one - remember when Naomi's sons took wives, Ruth and Orpah, and all this time we've thought that meant they got married in a big, happy wedding until scholar Dr. Wil Gafney suggested that the taking of Ruth and Orpah was more likely forced than romantic?

This early part of chapter four seems to emphasize the case, as Ruth is treated as property in a negotiation, and undesirable property at that - we know Boaz wants to be the redeemer and marry Ruth, but in order to convince the other man to walk away from the opportunity, he makes Ruth the undesirable part of the deal.

Is Boaz's behavior in these negotiations noble, as his character has previously been described? Or is it the most demeaning part of the story? Is he doing what must be done to be faithful to Ruth, or is he attempting to sell her off and get her out of his fields once and for all? Does it impact your deliberations if I remind you that Boaz is the son of Rahab - another woman whose reputation and past makes her an unlikely heroine in Jericho? (You can read up on her story in the book of Joshua!) What has Boaz learned from his own mother's story of redemption that has contributed to his character and to the way he feels about Ruth?

In her book about Ruth, Carolyn Custis James emphasizes that it is Boaz's love for God, his faithfulness, not some sort of romantic infatuation, nor patriarchal desire to control, that leads Boaz to this negotiation at the city gates.

Ultimately, the other relative declines to redeem Naomi and Ruth, in front of witnesses at the city gate. Boaz will become the redeemer. And here, Redeemer is a legal term, right? Boaz will purchase back into the family the land and people of Elimelech's estate so that they do not disappear into history absorbed by strangers. Redeemer carries the weight of describing someone who will pick up the pieces of a painful story and make a way for those pieces to become the beginning of something new instead of the bitter end of what was.

So is Boaz the redeemer in this story? Or is Ruth the redeemer - the one who has been willing all along the way to do whatever it takes: to walk the long road from Moab to Bethlehem at Naomi's side, to leave her culture and family because Naomi was too overcome with grief to carry on alone; to labor in the fields, gleaning food to support them both; to endure gossip and ridicule as the foreigner, the widow, the one who didn't belong; to do as her mother-in-law asks and meet Boaz in the night, helping him to see a potential future for their families to join together.

Does Ruth need a hero? Or is she the hero we all need in this story?

The arrangement between Boaz and Naomi is sealed with a sandal, as was the custom. Boaz and Ruth are married. And, in another surprise turn of events, Ruth becomes pregnant! After a decade of marriage to Naomi's son did not result in children, had Ruth given up on the idea that she would bear children? Was motherhood part of her dream?

Clearly, Naomi's dream has come true when Obed is born. She makes a decision, when she embraces Obed and nurses him to claim him as her family - remember that she has no biological link to Obed. She could have chosen to remain in bitterness, that Ruth and Boaz were able to have the family her own son never got to have. But perhaps Naomi has had enough of bitterness. She chooses joy.

The baby, Obed, becomes the sign to all that this story has been redeemed. The new life that brings this family joy and hope does not erase what they have lost. He does not eliminate the grief or undo the hardships these women have endured, but perhaps in this moment, that grief shifts enough to make room for hope.

And where will this joy, this unexpected hope, this new story lead?

To Obed, father of Jesse, father of David. To the lineage of Jesus, to the root of the tree up from which will come the Messiah. And Jesus will carry this family's inheritance: of redeemed stories, of unlikely heroes, of overturning cultural norms, of powerful women and gracious, noble men. Of personal sacrifice and of discovering hope and a future not by living backwards, but by living forward.

The redemption of this family culminates in Boaz's actions in chapter 4. But let's not forget where it began: in Ruth's incredibly risky decision back in chapter 1.

What are we willing to risk, trusting that the God of the universe will bring redemption, believing that grief and joy are not mutually exclusive, hoping that even as we mourn what we have lost we might embrace what we are discovering?

May you be inspired by the reading and hearing of the Scriptures, to live as God's redeemed. Amen.

HYMN

Let Us Break Bread Together

UMH #618

Let us break bread together on our knees
Let us break bread together on our knees
When I fall on my knees
With my face to the rising sun
O Lord, have mercy on me

Let us drink wine together on our knees
Let us drink wine together on our knees
When I fall on my knees
With my face to the rising sun
O Lord, have mercy on me

Let us praise God together on our knees
Let us praise God together on our knees
When I fall on my knees
With my face to the rising sun
O Lord, have mercy on me

INSTITUTION OF COMMUNION

PASTORAL PRAYER (Laura)

CLOSING SONG

The Lord's Prayer

Malotte arr. Richard Curtis

Our Father, who art in heaven
Hallowed be thy name
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done
On earth as it is in heaven
Give us this day our daily bread
And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors
And lead us not into temptation
But deliver us from evil
For thine is the kingdom
And the power and the glory forever
Amen

BENEDICTION

Families come get Bibles and take home supplies for Sunday School
Drive Thru Communion
Luminary Bags

POSTLUDE

Finale

Haydn, arr. Parks