

Service of the Word

Sunday, November 15th, 2020

Scripture Reading – Ruth 4 (ESV)

¹ Now Boaz had gone up to the gate and sat down there. And behold, the redeemer, of whom Boaz had spoken, came by. So Boaz said, “Turn aside, friend; sit down here.” And he turned aside and sat down. ² And he took ten men of the elders of the city and said, “Sit down here.” So they sat down. ³ Then he said to the redeemer, “Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land that belonged to our relative Elimelech. ⁴ So I thought I would tell you of it 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 will not, tell me, that I may know, for there is no one besides you to redeem it, and I come after you.” And he said, “I will redeem it.” ⁵ Then Boaz said, “The day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the widow of the dead, in order to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance.” ⁶ Then the redeemer said, “I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it.” ⁷ Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging: to confirm a transaction, the one drew off his sandal and gave it to the other, and this was the manner of attesting in Israel. ⁸ So when the redeemer said to Boaz, “Buy it for yourself,” he drew off his sandal. ⁹ Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, “You are witnesses this day that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and to Mahlon. ¹⁰ Also Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Mahlon, I have bought to be my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brothers and from the gate of his native place. You are witnesses this day.” ¹¹ Then all the people who were at the gate and the elders said, “We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman, who is coming into your house, like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you act worthily in Ephrathah and be renowned in Bethlehem, ¹² and may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring that the LORD will give you by this young woman.”

¹³ So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and the LORD gave her conception, and she bore a son. ¹⁴ Then the women said to Naomi, “Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! ¹⁵ He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.” ¹⁶ Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. ¹⁷ And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi.” They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

¹⁸ Now these are the generations of Perez: Perez fathered Hezron, ¹⁹ Hezron fathered Ram, Ram fathered Amminadab, ²⁰ Amminadab fathered Nahshon, Nahshon fathered Salmon, ²¹ Salmon fathered Boaz, Boaz fathered Obed, ²² Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered David.

Love Story

Ruth 4

“And”, in the words of Bilbo Baggins, the hero of JRR Tolkien’s, *The Hobbit*, “they lived happily ever after to the end of their days...”

Or so it seems, but how do you end a love story?

That is, after all, what we’ve been studying as we’ve worked our way through Book of Ruth. It’s a story about the love of a young Moabite woman for her Israelite family; a family that had been driven by famine to leave Israel and to go down into enemy territory. It’s a story about the way that she loved a her mother-in-law so much that even when everything went wrong and all the men in the family had died, still, she refused to let go and to return to the home of her own family. And it’s a story about the love that this same young Moabite woman came to share with an aging farmer who first noticed her as she was following his servants, trying to glean a little grain from that which the harvesters left behind. It’s a story about love that refused to be thwarted by prejudice and fear; love that flirted with the boundaries of tradition and then crossed them.

And, as we saw last week, “true love conquers all.” Boaz marries Ruth, and the story draws to a close. Except it doesn’t; not quite, because we’re told in our text this morning that when Boaz had taken Ruth to be his wife, the Lord enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son—a little boy who was placed on the lap of his grandmother, Naomi.

Just as the elders had prayed

¹¹ “...May the LORD make the woman, who is coming into your house, like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you act worthily in Ephrathah and be renowned in Bethlehem, ¹² and may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring that the LORD will give you by this young woman.”

Ruth 4:11–12 (ESV)

And it’s an interesting blessing...

Through the offspring the Lord gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of “Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.”

Really? “May your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah”.

This would be the Tamar who, being denied her rights as Judah’s daughter-in-law, dressed herself as a harlot and seduced her father-in-law so that she could finally have children. It hardly seems an appropriate blessing for this new family. But then, maybe it is appropriate for a man who marries a Moabite to build a family through her. After all, the story of Judah and Tamar turned out alright despite being a bit non-traditional, and maybe the Elders are acknowledging that this story seems to be turning out the same way.

And it does, because God does grant Boaz and Ruth a child, as he did Judah and Tamar. And the child is a blessing, even as the women of Bethlehem offered their praises to God, saying,

¹⁴ “Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! ¹⁵ He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.” Ruth 4:14–15 (ESV)

And, again, their blessing is not only interesting, but a little surprising.

¹⁴ “Blessed be the LORD, who has not left you this day without a redeemer...

And if we’ve been paying attention, then we think, “Of course not. Boaz is the kinsman redeemer. Boaz became life and hope and salvation, at least humanly speaking, for the remnant of Naomi’s family when he loved Ruth and made her his bride. But that’s not what the women of Bethlehem were saying. They continued,

“...for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.”

In other words, they’re not thinking of Boaz as the Kinsman redeemer. They’re looking at his son, the baby, Obed. And it seems odd, because this little boy—this baby— isn’t going to be redeeming anyone for a very long time. It will be decades before he grows into his inheritance and the chances are good that Naomi never lived to see it. It was a rare blessing in those days for a person to see their children’s children to a fourth generation. So we have to wonder at this **prophecy**, because that’s what it is in the end. We have to wonder if the women of Bethlehem even understood the meaning behind their song.

You see, they may have meant it to be an end to the story, and it would have made a fine ending. Naomi came home from Moab bitter and empty, except for daughter-in-law whom she had asked to stay behind. She thought her life was over until the day that Boaz met Ruth and fell in love with her and determined to make her his wife. Now they were not only married, but they had given Naomi a grandson and her life was full again, and the women of Bethlehem think to provide the “happily ever after” to the end of the tale.

But the women of Bethlehem didn’t write the tale, though without a doubt they told it for centuries. The story was written down much later, possibly by the old prophet, Samuel, who may or may not have cared much about the love between Ruth and Boaz. What he did care about finds expression in the very next verses, and this is the reason the book exists. Verse 16 and 17:

¹⁶ Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. ¹⁷ And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, “A son has been born to Naomi.” They named him Obed. **He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.** Ruth 4:16–17 (ESV)

You see the chief concern of Samuel, or whoever it was that wrote this story down, was to establish the link between David, the King of Israel and the line of his forefathers that had gone before. Samuel goes on,

¹⁸ Now these are the generations of Perez: Perez fathered Hezron, ¹⁹ Hezron fathered Ram, Ram fathered Amminadab, ²⁰ Amminadab fathered Nahshon, Nahshon fathered

Salmon, ²¹ Salmon fathered Boaz, Boaz fathered Obed, ²² Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered David. Ruth 4:18–22 (ESV)

And that effectively ties David all the way back to Judah, who was the son of Jacob and the father of Perez, and the founder of one of the 12 tribes of Israel.

But there's still something else going on here, and by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, it may have been beyond even the author to discern, because this is not really a genealogy of distinction. See, "This...is the family line of Perez" according to verse 18, but as we've seen, Perez was conceived when his mother disguised herself and played the harlot with her father-in-law, Judah, who was refusing to allow a younger son to serve as a kinsman redeemer. And Boaz? His mother was Rahab, a Canaanite and a prostitute. Hardly the sort of thing that's going to find mention in most family histories, but the author includes it here, at least by making reference to Perez and Boaz and we don't really have to wonder why.

Because how do you end a love story as beautiful as that of Boaz and Ruth? You end it with another love story even more beautiful, and one that really does put a "happily ever after" like a seal on the story. You see, by filling in the blanks in the genealogy, the author connects the dots between King David and his forefather Judah and therefore Abraham as well, and that was very important to the reader in Samuel's day. But for us, the importance runs still deeper, because long before the story of Boaz and Ruth, God made a promise to his people, through Abraham saying,

¹⁷ I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven and as the sand that is on the seashore. And your offspring shall possess the gate of his enemies, ¹⁸ and in your offspring shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because you have obeyed my voice." Genesis 22:17–18 (ESV)

And that blessing certainly includes David, the King of Israel. But primarily, it's about David's greater son, Jesus Christ, the son of David according to human ancestry, but declared by the Holy Spirit to be the Son of God, our Lord and our Savior.

So in the love story of an aging farmer and a Moabite refugee we find the seeds of the greatest love story ever told, because as Boaz loved Ruth, and did all that he had to do to make her his own, redeeming her, perhaps even at some cost to himself because he loved her more than his own life, even so God, in Christ Jesus, the great-great-great grandson of Boaz and Ruth demonstrates his own great love for us, doing all that was necessary to make us his own.

For Jesus, this was certainly achieved at great cost. But he loved us and he gave himself for us. He did not regard the glory that he had with the Father before the world began as something to be grasped, so he let go, emptying himself and taking the form of a servant. And as a true human being, Son of God and Son of man, he was obedient unto death, even death on the cross, for us, and our salvation. And it's a love story—the love story, because

¹⁶ "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." John 3:16 (ESV)

And that's how you end the greatest love story ever told: **you don't**. It began in the garden of Eden when the world was still brand new. It was spoken of through the prophets. It was

confirmed by covenant to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and David. It was told in the story of Boaz and Ruth, and it continues to be told to this day. Because right here, right now, we are called to remember and believe that God loved us and sent his son.

And he confirms his covenant of love with us, calling us to come and to receive his grace, promising that one day, our kinsman-redeemer, Jesus Christ his son, will return in glory to claim his bride, the church. Then, we will we will be like him for we will see him as he is, and at the end (or maybe the true beginning) of the greatest love story ever told, we will truly live happily ever after for the rest of our days in the gracious kingdom of our God.