

Reading: Ruth 3: 1 – 18

One day Ruth's mother-in-law Naomi said to her, "My daughter, I must find a home for you, where you will be well provided for. ² Now Boaz, with whose women you have worked, is a relative of ours. Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. ³ Wash, put on perfume, and get dressed in your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don't let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. ⁴ When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do."

⁵ "I will do whatever you say," Ruth answered. ⁶ So she went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do. ⁷ When Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits, he went over to lie down at the far end of the grain pile. Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down. ⁸ In the middle of the night something startled the man; he turned—and there was a woman lying at his feet!

⁹ "Who are you?" he asked.

"I am your servant Ruth," she said. "Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a guardian-redeemer of our family."

¹⁰ "The Lord bless you, my daughter," he replied. "This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor. ¹¹ And now, my daughter, don't be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All the people of my town know that you are a woman of noble character. ¹² Although it is true that I am a guardian-redeemer of our family, there is another who is more closely related than I. ¹³ Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to do his duty as your guardian-redeemer, good; let him redeem you. But if he is not willing, as surely as the Lord lives I will do it. Lie here until morning."

¹⁴ So she lay at his feet until morning but got up before anyone could be recognized; and he said, "No one must know that a woman came to the threshing floor."

¹⁵ He also said, "Bring me the shawl you are wearing and hold it out." When she did so, he poured into it six measures of barley and placed the bundle on her. Then he went back to town. ¹⁶ When Ruth came to her mother-in-law, Naomi asked, "How did it go, my daughter?"

Then she told her everything Boaz had done for her ¹⁷ and added, "He gave me these six measures of barley, saying, 'Don't go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.'"

¹⁸ Then Naomi said, "Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today."

Preaching notes:

The book of Ruth was written in dark times in Israel's history, when people lived to please themselves. So the focus is on three people remaining strong and true to God - even when society around was collapsing. Millennia later, we can find truths here for ourselves, today. If a woman was widowed, and she had no sons to care for her, Jewish law (Deut 25: 5 – 10) stated that her dead husband's brother should marry her. (No matter whether she liked it or not - just a practicality). Or if no brother, someone who was a relative could volunteer to take responsibility for the extended family, and often called a kinsman redeemer. A footnote in NRSV at Ruth 3:13 says – *one with a right to redeem*. That word immediately brings to mind the need for rescue at a time of some deep trouble, with other options explored. Naomi's husband had family back in Judah, so could there be a kinsman redeemer to perhaps, at least, look after the young widow of Elimelech's son, if not the mother in law? Otherwise, there was great likelihood of severe poverty for widows, even to death.

In today's reading, Naomi's suggestion to Ruth, at first glance might seem like seduction! But not really. It was acting out a custom. A servant often slept at the feet of the master, and even shared the same covering. Ruth doing that would signify to Boaz that he could be the one to protect her, to be her master, and maybe become the kinsman redeemer by finding someone to marry Ruth, as Naomi probably wished! So it was more of a business deal – not a romance. Later, with Ruth's grandson becoming the famous King David, the

story was remembered and written down, and then could be seen as a beautiful romance, although it is a good story for other and better reasons!

Naomi had decided that Boaz was the nearest relative in her husband's family, and once Boaz had seen Ruth working in the fields, he'd liked her. She worked hard; he noted how others felt about her; and maybe had heard from relatives that she was Naomi's daughter-in-law. It all added up to Boaz committing himself straight away to Ruth. (Ruth 3. 9-11) Then, in honesty and integrity, Boaz mentioned a closer relative of Ruth's father-in law, who would have a family right. So he, Boaz, would offer that man the opportunity to care for Ruth! That must have taken some doing, not to grab Ruth and marry her for himself! But Boaz knew it would be marrying in wrong circumstances – even though he wanted to marry her. Integrity like that illustrates God's standards and ideals for his people and for our world. Boaz did give Ruth the gift of 6 measures of barley, though, regardless of the outcome of a visit to Elimelech's relative. A generous gesture. Boaz thought of others before himself. He helped Ruth because she had thought of Naomi before herself.

The Dictionary definition of Integrity: uprightness; honesty; purity; entireness; wholeness. Crossword alternatives can be: decency, justice; cohesion and morality. All so vital in life.

Boaz had shown great integrity concerning Ruth from the very beginning - even before the custom of lying at his feet was enacted. Ruth showed integrity in staying with Naomi, and in respecting her mother-in-law's culture.

Taking the right action in a situation, faces us all from time to time, with choices that are not easy, and especially when we do not know the future. Taking the right action in integrity – as God would have us do are words for today. May others find God in our integrity when we make decisions living out our Christian faith.

Amen

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