

Ruth 3 Thy Kingdom Come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven

Jesus taught us to pray for our Father's kingdom to come and his will to be done right here on earth, just as it is done in heaven. That sounds wonderful. But what does it look like in real life?

We could look to Jesus of course, but we never see Jesus buying anything. Jesus never got married. There is a lot of human life that Jesus never lived.

This is one of the reasons why the book of Ruth matters so much. It's been called a 'memory of the future'. Someday, all of human life will look something like what we see in Ruth's story. Some day all women and all men will use their strength to show kindness. As they do, the kindness they show is really God's kindness. In this story, and in our Father's kingdom, no one tries to control anyone or guarantee any kind of outcome for themselves. They just do the right thing and trust God with the outcome.

At the beginning of chapter 3 Naomi has come back to life again. She is thinking about the future. But she is concerned for Ruth. Back in chapter 1 she had prayed that the Lord would bless Ruth with rest in the home of a new husband. Here, Naomi decides that since Ruth has come with her and cared for her, she will try to find a secure home for Ruth.

She gives Ruth instructions, and directions about how to approach Boaz. Somehow I see her giggling as she sends Ruth off into the night to surprise Boaz. He has been kind, and he is a close relative. At the end of the chapter, she is receiving six measures of barley that have come back to her, a gift and blessing from Boaz.

Naomi acts in Ruth's interest, and Naomi is blessed in return.

Remember from last week that Boaz is called, 'a man of standing' in 2:1? We said that it meant, 'a strong man'. Jumping ahead just a bit, here in chapter 3, Boaz says to Ruth, 'all my people know that you are a woman of noble character'. The Hebrew word is the same as in 2:1. Ruth is a 'strong woman'. She is strong in faith, strong in character, and strong in her commitment to Naomi. She is a match to Boaz, the strong man. (As an aside, let's pause for a moment here. Ruth and Boaz are both people with strong faith and character. One of the dangerous things we do is meet someone and think, "my faith is strong enough for both of us". Or "sure there are some character things I'm not that crazy about, but I can work on those..... There is a lot of grief down that road. Far better to set the bar higher and look for a life partner who shares our faith and whose character is inspiring, not challenging. Time will come when those qualities will matter a lot.)

Ruth, the strong and wise woman, listens to her mother-in-law. She washes and perfumes herself, gets dressed. Most people who have studied this story closely say these things mean that Ruth's time of mourning for her husband is over. In another story, when King David's son by Bathsheba dies, he mourns for a time and then does exactly the same three things that Ruth does. Washes, perfumes, gets dressed in ordinary clothes again.

Watching under cover of darkness, Ruth notices where Boaz goes to the very end of the huge pile of threshed grain, away from everyone else and lies down. He is soon asleep.

Ruth very quietly goes over, uncovers his feet (more likely his legs) and lies down.

She does what ?! This is very strange. And not only to us.

When the story was first told, the customs already needed to be explained to the listeners. And even when they are given in Deuteronomy the two customs, redeeming the land and marrying the widow for the sake of the dead man, are not connected to each other.

‘Why didn’t Naomi just go talk to Boaz during the day?’ Good question.

It is hard to know the answer.

What Ruth shows us though, is her courage and commitment **to Naomi**. She is putting herself at risk, ‘laying down her life’ in a way. Boaz has been feasting and drinking, who knows what he might do. Ruth could be used, rejected or shamed. She is a Moabite woman in Israel and life could become very hard for her if this does not go well. But off she goes, and when something startles the man, like perhaps a cool breeze on his exposed feet and legs, **she** takes the initiative. **She** proposes marriage to the most prominent man in Bethlehem. "I am your servant Ruth," she says. "Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a kinsman-redeemer."

Ruth is a committed, kind, adventurous, risk taker. Boaz knows she could have abandoned Naomi and tried to find a younger man for love or money.

A woman who takes great risks for committed love and kindness is an inspiring example for us.

Boaz responds as Boaz. Strong faith, strong character, he does the right thing. Even after a harvest party in the middle of the night, at the far end of the grain pile when no one else is around, and a woman has snuggled up to him and signalled something, he **still** does the right thing.

Clearly he has thought about Ruth and Naomi. He knows in the middle of the night, that there is someone else ahead of him in line. Boaz could have bunted that guy out of the way, but he doesn't!

He has the courage to do the right thing. Boaz is not married. This might be his only chance. It would make sense for him to seize the opportunity, what if Ruth is redeemed by someone else? Boaz is not afraid. He has the courage and the faith to do the right thing by Ruth and for Naomi, but also for this other relative, we have never heard of till now.

A man who has the courage to do the right thing, even in the middle of the night when he is startled awake is an inspiring example to us. Today is Father's Day. Some of us as dads or sons might need some good manly examples to encourage and inspire us to do the right and the kind. We have one here.

At the beginning of this message, we said that God works through people.

Our kindness is really God's kindness.

Take a look at how the author of Ruth ties these together:

Ruth 2:12 Boaz to Ruth ¹² May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge."

Ruth 3:9 "Who are you?" he asked.

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

Refuge under the Lord's wings turns out to be refuge under the corner of Boaz' garment. Again, this is a different time, different place, different culture. The point is that Ruth (and Naomi) find protection because Boaz acts with the care of the Lord.

In the last two weeks we have been talking about strength. It has been a strange time to talk about strength because over the last two weeks we have been made very aware of the limits of our strength. One of our members, Henry V. was in a very serious bicycle accident two weeks ago and has been in Foothills Hospital in Calgary in a coma since then. One of the very hard things about Henry's accident for all of us has been that we have felt helpless to do anything to help him. If we could raise funds for him, if we could build something or drive somewhere that would help him, we would. But we cannot. There is a limit to our strength and to the things we are able to do.

This is not a bad lesson to learn. Knowing the limits of our own strength is part of wisdom.

As the famous serenity prayer of Reinhold Neibuhr asks: "God, grant me the grace to accept with serenity the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference".

To know what we can do and to do it, and to live with that, is an act of courage, obedience, love and faith. To know what we cannot do, (change someone else for example) and to stop trying and trust God, is an act of courage, obedience, love, faith, and self-discipline.

God's love and blessing **come through us to others** when we use our strength to love and bless, to do the right, kind thing. Our strength has limits, both in what it can do, and in how much we have. But this is our assurance:

The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He will not grow tired or weary,
and his understanding no one can fathom.

²⁹ He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.

³⁰ Even youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and fall;

³¹ but those who hope in the LORD
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.

The Lord gives us the strength and wisdom to do the right and the kind. That's what Paul means when he writes in Philippians 4:13 'I can do everything through him who gives me strength'.

The Lord be gracious to you,

The Lord be gracious to me,

And all God's people said, Amen.

