

## WELCOME 21<sup>st</sup> June 2020 – 3 Pentecost '20 A

### Ruth 2

Good morning! Welcome back to the On-line well of Living Water! It's great we can be together in this way...in this time when we can't be together. I'm glad you're here AND I pray that when we **ARE** back together...if you've never been with us before except on livestream...you'll pop in & hang out with us in person. Please check our website for our weekly Zoom Bible Study catch-ups. Those are a great way to stay in touch & experience God's Word together!

*As we move into this week...Filthy Rich & Homeless: a televised social experiment where some wealthy folks give up their luxury cars, expensive clothes & big safe secure mansions to live for 10 days among the homeless. While it opens eyes/hearts/wallets on behalf of the homeless among us; for the well-heeled "reality" participants, it's a short-term gig. They eventually go back to where they came from...high-paying work, expansive lifestyles, filthy rich & privileged.*

For Ruth & Naomi, every day was a new risk; another throw of the dice to find food, shelter, & safety. Every day their future was a wager between life & death.

But *EVERY DAY* was also a new opportunity in God's grace...& every grace-filled moment drew them closer & closer to the Father's healing restoring heart.

*We're engaging one of the shortest & most exciting books of the Bible: Ruth*

Having seen in Chapter 1 the lives of these 2 women fall apart...We now find them broke & alone. No TV writer could imagine a more desolate situation than two widows -- one older returning to a home she left behind & one younger a foreigner among a people not her own -- trying to make their way in the ancient world. The fact that the younger widow is from a despised race & the older widow has no rightful place to call her home, means their situation was desperate indeed.

But in those moments, when you wonder if God has forgotten you or even intentionally stepped on your heart, you discover God has not left you to crumble on your own. He is still holding you, still leading you, & still working in you for his glory. In the very worst of times, God's demonstrates the mystery of His grace & mercy at work to draw us back into his arms bringing fullness from our desolation and blessing from our bitterness.

We'll continue exploring that today...as we experience the '**SWEETNESS OF REDEMPTION**' from the book of Ruth as God leads us from **BITTERNESS TO BLESSING**.

Let's pray...and then we'll get stuck into it.

### PRAYER OF THE DAY

*Father what have we done to deserve such kindness? It is good to be together, God, on these screens, with these people, together listening for your voice, united by your Spirit. In this time of worship, in this season of quarantine's loosening, tell us about your kingdom of kindness so that we can seek it above all else. Show us your justice so we can live it wherever we are. We want to walk with you, humbly, closely, daily. In Jesus' Name...Amen!*

### FAITH CHAT:

1. How do you face risky situations? If you were convinced God was working with you, how would that change?
2. In your current circumstances, where do you think God has been at work, maybe behind the scenes?
3. Who is someone for whom you can act like Ruth to Naomi or Boaz to Ruth & demonstrate God's compassion & provision for those in difficult circumstances??

**BIBLES**

### 3 Pentecost '20 A - 'SWEETNESS OF REDEMPTION': FROM BITTERNESS TO BLESSING

When we still lived in Texas, I heard what would have to be one of the saddest news stories ever. A man was travelling on one of the big interstate highways & pulled into a rest area to do the stop/revive/survive thing & unknowingly unintentionally ran over a homeless man killing him instantly. The question immediately comes to mind: How in the world do you run over a person w/o knowing you're doing it? The driver explained:

*I saw what I thought was a bag of trash lying in the middle of the turnoff & since I couldn't avoid it w/o driving off the road I ran over it. But it wasn't a bag of trash! It was that man!*

It hurts my heart just thinking that one person could look at the passed out body of another person in the middle of the road & see not another human being but a bag of trash...**BUT** at the same time, we know, our world, *AT THIS VERY MOMENT*, is in major turmoil because many still live in such a way that we look at one another & see not fellow human beings not another person who shares with us the image of God not someone who has intrinsic value as one who has been died for & risen for in Jesus...we see **only** the historical accidents of the flesh (race, sex, tribe) that are but a fraction of who we truly are & who we are truly intended to be.

One of my former teachers used to say, "Before we understand what we see, we have to **actually see** what we see," & this part of the account of Ruth & Naomi actually begins with seeing & being seen & how life can be transformed in that simple moment of being seen...**BIBLES**...From last week/Ruth 1 remember we enter the account at a terrible time in the life of God's people...time of Judges. *Israel had no king. Everyone did what was right in their own eyes.* It is a time of near anarchy...unregulated selfishness..."me looking out for me & you're on your own." *right in their own eyes* means you're making it up as you go along...situational ethics...bankrupt morals...you go be you...I can't judge...That sort of wrongheadedness. Into that caldron of a spiritual dog's breakfast, *a severe famine came upon the land.* Famine is no happenstance/accident. God told his people their lives have consequence. Live like I don't exist live like I'm not God live like you are the master of your fate & you reap anarchy you reap heartache & bloodshed you reap famine...

So Elimelech runs away...turns his back on God & the blessings God promised in his allotted portion of the land God had given to his ancestors & becomes a refugee among pagan enemy: Moabites. Over time his 2 sons marry Moabite wives (strictly prohibited by God's command but since it seemed right in Elimelech's eyes who's going to argue) In the end, all 3 men end up 6-feet-under/dead as doornails & their wives are homeless/penniless/hopeless. One daughter-in-law takes this chance to go back to Moab/her family & start over where there might still be opportunity for survival, the other (Ruth) & Elimelech's widow (Naomi) cast their collective lot back among the people of God in Israel near Bethlehem, Naomi's last known address. As they arrive home again, Naomi is convinced God is her adversary & her future is bleak. She expects nothing but a lifetime of bitter circumstances etched in bitter regret. That was Ruth 1/Last week. Now...

Where did we start today? *Now there was a wealthy & influential man in Bethlehem named Boaz, who was a relative of Naomi's husband, Elimelech.* Some of your Bibles will translate that description of Boaz differently (noble, prominent, man of outstanding character) What that means is Boaz was living up to his name: "strength is w/in him." Aside: Bible names almost always mean something or tell us something about the person. Naomi says don't call me "pleasantness" any more but Mara "bitterness" because her life has become a bitter burden for her. But Boaz has lived into his name. He is a man of inner strength/integrity/noble character...his wisdom is weighty...voice is to be taken into account.

Where/How do I see that? (understand what we see, we have to **actually see** what we see) 1<sup>st</sup> impressions can tell a great deal & the 1<sup>st</sup> thing we see of Boaz: *vs 4 Boaz arrived from Bethlehem & greeted the harvesters. "The Lord be with you!" he said.* Boaz walks into the harvest-field & instead of asking about bushels/acre, bags/worker, efficiency, or time to completion...he blesses his workforce in the name of Yahweh. He invokes the favour of the Father on his employees. When was the last time your boss...never mind, I think I know. Boaz treats the lowest least skilled workers w/ dignity/respect. He sees them as people not as mere cogs in his economic machine. Let that just sit w/ you for a minute...He sees his employees as people not simply as means to boost his ROI.

But what's more...Boaz not only sees his employees, he also sees the poor who are gleaning his field after his workers harvest the crops. Now understand...acc to OT Law...a landowner was not to harvest his whole field. The very edges of the field & any stalks of grain missed or dropped by the harvesters were left for the poor who were working behind the harvesters. It's all done by hand by groups of individual workers doing the back-breaking labour. OT Law required a landowner to allow the poor to "work" his field & gather any leftover crops to feed their family. The assumption: Being poor is not a crime. Being hungry should get you working. Lazy/can't work...then starve or beg. Boaz is certainly just acc to Law. He is also gracious. Boaz lives out grace what looks like. Boaz treats Ruth/others as God treats us... w/ unmerited, undeserved kindness/favour. In Boaz we're going to see a hint of how God treats us in Jesus. *watch...*

Among those “working poor,” Boaz sees Ruth & is told by the harvest foreman the circumstances of her being in his field. Ruth is an outsider in Israel. She has come w/ Naomi w/ no guarantees...no built-in rights...no security. Every day is a new risk; another throw of the dice to find food, shelter, & safety. Every day her future was a wager between life & death...She is spending every ounce of energy to make some way in this precarious dangerous world for herself/Naomi. Boaz sees Ruth...You ever feel invisible? Like no one knows/notices? Like you could disappear & no one would take any note? *What's the price of 2 sparrows: 1 copper coin? But not a single sparrow falls to the ground w/o your Father knowing it. The very hairs on your head are numbered. Don't be afraid; you are more valuable to God than a whole flock of sparrows. – Mt 10:29-31* Jesus says your life is never invisible off the radar out of the Father's sight. Every hair accounted for...every sigh heard...every day recorded...every tear held...every prayer answered. The Father takes note of YOU...your life...your wounds your circumstances/your struggles/your sorrows...as surely as Boaz saw Ruth. Boaz knows deep in his heart that in the Father's eyes, ALL LIVES MATTER. Infant in the womb, labourer in his field, most powerful in the country. ALL LIVES MATTER

But if it stopped at simply “seeing” it wouldn't be grace...Grace is active on behalf of someone else for their good that they do not deserve. If you've been around LW you know I believe one of the most powerful texts in Scripture is Ex 3:7-9 God calls Moses to lead God's people out of slavery in Egypt into the land God promised them...the land God chose to be their home where he will dwell among them: *“I have seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of the slave drivers. I know how much they're suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the power of the Egyptians & bring them out of Egypt into their own fertile & spacious land.”* What's true there is what's true in the whole of the Bible: As grace increases, distance decreases. As grace increases, the distance between people & the Father decreases. It is by grace alone that God draws us to him...Boaz shows us.

1<sup>st</sup> he sees Ruth. Then Boaz included Ruth among his own people even though she was not his people. vs 8-9 *“Boaz went over & said to Ruth, “Listen, my daughter. Stay right here w/us when you gather grain; don't go to any other fields. Stay right behind the young women working in my field. See which part of the field they are harvesting, & follow them.”* Ruth, the outsider, is welcomed into the company of Boaz's people & given status now that is not naturally her own. Remember where she started the day: a foreign widow who did not know a soul in Boaz's field come to seek the leftovers. She is now invited into the realm of Boaz's care.

But he doesn't stop there. Boaz offered Ruth protection against those who might harm her & provision beyond the results of her own efforts. vs 9 Boaz says, *“I have warned the young men not to treat you roughly. And when you are thirsty, help yourself to the water they have drawn from the well.”* & 14 *At mealtime Boaz called to her, “Come over here, & help yourself to some food. You can dip your bread in the sour wine.” So she sat with his harvesters, & Boaz gave her some roasted grain to eat. She ate all she wanted & still had some left over.* Ruth's vulnerability cannot be overstated & Boaz knows. So he throws his protective edict around her...the 1<sup>st</sup> ever recorded anti-sexual harassment policy in all of history? This is the nature of God's grace: it draws us under His protection & care. As grace increases, distance decreases. As grace increases, the distance between people & the Father decreases. To invite her to eat & drink from their supplies indicates a closeness & a growing kinship. Biblical grace is protecting & providing grace. Grace assures us God will never abandon us to the threats of this world or the viciousness of sin, death & evil...How did Jesus say it: *I give you peace, the kind of peace that only I can give. It isn't like the peace that this world can give. So don't be worried or afraid. – Jn 14:27* peace protection provision

But Boaz doesn't stop there. After lunch he moves from charity grace to lavish generous grace...Up to now he's fulfilling the commands of the law to care for widow orphans & the poor who come to glean. He has gone beyond the required measures but he was only just getting started. *When Ruth went back to work again, Boaz ordered his young men, “Let her gather grain right among the sheaves without stopping her. And pull out some heads of barley from the bundles & drop them on purpose for her. Let her pick them up, & don't give her a hard time!”* This is not just the letter of the law. This is gobsmacking over the top out of the box off the charts generosity. Instead of plucking at leftover stalks, Ruth & no other is brought to gather among the harvesters **AND** they are told to drop a few stalks for her benefit. So much generosity has been lavished upon Ruth that by day's end she's carrying home <sup>b/t</sup> 14 & 19Kgs of barley...**AND** he invites her to stay until the full harvest is complete...about 7 weeks in total. It's conceivable she'll have gathered enough in that span of time to feed herself & Naomi for the better part of a year.

But the real miracle of grace is still unfolding...As grace increases, distance decreases. As grace increases, the distance between people & the Father decreases...Watch Naomi...the one who wanted to be called “bitter” *“...for the Almighty has made life very bitter for me. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me home empty...the Lord has caused me to suffer & the Almighty has sent such tragedy upon me?”*...the one who was convinced Yahweh had become her adversary: *“Where did you gather all this grain today?” Naomi asked. “Where did you work? May the Lord bless the one who helped you!”*

So Ruth told her mother-in-law about the man in whose field she had worked. She said, "The man I worked with today is named Boaz." Naomi replied, "May he be blessed by the Lord, who has not forsaken his kindness to the living or the dead. That man is one of our closest relatives, one of our family redeemers." God's grace poured out lavishly through Boaz is drawing Naomi from bitterness to praise. As Ruth shares the account of her day of grace Naomi is being healed & drawn into the Father's restoring love mercy & grace along with her. Author Katharine Sakenfeld writes, "Naomi has begun a healing journey, a journey from despair to hope, a journey from a living death to a life worth living." She is now able to acknowledge God's unfailing love & mercy still working in her life.

No TV writer could imagine a more desolate situation than two widows -- one older returning to a home she left behind & one younger a foreigner among a people not her own -- trying to make their way in the ancient world. When that day dawned For Ruth & Naomi, it was a day of risk; another throw of the dice to find food, shelter, & safety...the day was a wager between life & death. But they discovered that *EVERY DAY* is also a new opportunity in God's grace...& every grace-filled moment drew them closer & closer to the Father's healing restoring heart

Look...in those moments, when you wonder if God has forgotten you or even intentionally stepped on your heart, when others have mistreated you or your own rebellion has put you in a very bad place...Remember: God has not left you to crumble on your own. He wants your heart, & he will lavish grace upon grace to draw you to him. He calls you by his grace & he whispers through your pain. He is still holding you, still leading you, & still working in you for his glory. In the very worst of times, God's demonstrates the mystery of His grace & mercy at work to draw us back into his arms bringing fullness from our desolation and blessing from our bitterness.

Ruth asks... "What have I done to deserve such kindness?" she asked. "I am only a foreigner." It's grace. You can't earn it. You can't deserve it. It is the unfailing love of God that has taken hold & drawn you to his heart. We're all foreigners...all strangers & aliens in rebellion until Christ dies & rises to make us sons & daughters of the Father. John writes: "From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace." - Jn 1:16 one gracious blessing after another

I'll finish with 3 scriptures...as a foretaste of that blessing that never ends...hear them as your assurance/certainty

*Don't be afraid, for I am with you. Don't be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you. I will help you.*

*I will hold you up with my victorious right hand. – Isaiah 41:10*

*"I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with unfailing kindness." – Jeremiah 31:3*

*But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God's grace that you have been saved!) – Ephesians 2:4-5*

Let's pray with that in mind...

Father, we come with our prayers & praises not because we are worthy of your attention, but because you have lifted us from death into your abundant life in Christ Jesus. You alone are deserving of our love & adoration & you have called us to pray for one another & to love even as we have been loved by you. Give us confidence as we submit our hearts & desires to yours. As we pray transform us into people of action on behalf of human need.

We pray for those who hold position of high leadership; presidents & prime ministers, members of parliaments & congress, senators, governors, mayors, members of city councils, military officials, ambassadors & all whose role it is to govern for the good of many. Defend them Lord from the distraction of greed or selfish gain. Lead them to pursue justice, peace, & truth. Shine your righteousness into their deliberations so they lead according to your good purposes.

Gracious God since you "did not spare even (your) own Son but gave him up for us all" we trust you will give us everything else we need. Loving God, we do not ask for special favours but that you will help us delight in, and share generously, the favours you have already given. In gratitude and trust we commit ourselves and all that we have into your hands. Give your angels charge of us that the wicked one have no place or power among us.

Lord we pray for an end to the fear & contagion that has had us locked away from our brothers & sisters. In all those places where life is moving forward into free space, let your church also be free of the burden of dread for the joy of sharing your salvation in Jesus Christ. We remember those places where chaos seeks to overthrow your good order & where the evil one works to destroy the good others have accomplished. Let human hearts recognize your love's supremacy against all violence & cultural disorder.

Remember us in your kingdom & teach us to pray...