

## WELCOME 28<sup>th</sup> June 2020 – 4 Pentecost '20 A

Ruth 3

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 you are blessed immeasurably in this brief time on-line. 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!

Today we're doing things a bit differently. There are more Group Study/Discussion resources available for you on our website & I hope you've got those handy. Our streamed service is going to be more compact so you have time to go through that material & the Growing Praise with those you've gathered in your homes. For these next few weeks we'll be equipping you so your home becomes a place of the Spirit working leading you into the fullness of God's word & his work in your lives & then out into this city to declare what God has done for you. **As we move into this week...**

"Swipe right." is the code language of dating apps that means "I'm available if you're interested."

In the world of Ruth & Boaz, that's what a bath, perfume, nice clothes & sleeping at Boaz's feet means.

"I'm available if you're interested."

It means the time of mourning is over.

It signals an openness to the future.

It suggests hope & gladness instead of struggle & grief.

It says now is the day of new life in the arms of the redeemer.

*"As surely as the Lord lives, I will redeem you myself." – Ruth 3:13c*

That's not just a promise from Boaz to Ruth. It's the promise of Christ to all whom he calls brothers & sisters. It's the commitment of the Redeemer to do whatever it takes, pay whatever the cost, to claim for the Father all trapped in sin & death and who live under the burden of fear, grief, shame & brokenness.

*"With his own blood—not the blood of goats and calves—Jesus Christ entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever." – Hebrews 9:12*

From the beginning...whenever you've felt forgotten, invisible, as if no one can understand or deal with your life but you: God has been holding you, leading you, & working in you for his glory. The mystery & certainty of God's grace & mercy is always 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...then we'll get stuck into it.

### PRAYER OF THE DAY (by Cornelius Plantinga Jr)

*Gracious God, Champion of the Universe, we so often puff ourselves up. Aren't we the only creatures who compose masterpieces of music & art? Don't we govern ourselves, enrich ourselves, promote ourselves? Can't we dunk basketballs, bat baseballs, kick footballs? Aren't some of us masters of comic irony? Other creatures don't practice rocket science. We do.*

*And yet. Here we are, frightened by a thing so small it can't be seen under most microscopes. It's not even an animal or a plant. It's a virus, a mere parasite, dependent on our own living cells to replicate. Yet it has shuttered our schools, cancelled our flights, & emptied our churches. It has consumed the attention of our leading scientists, wrenched our politics out of shape, dominated our conversations, & scared the daylights out of us. We don't want to get sick. And we don't want to die. We are afraid, O God. Afraid of a microorganism. Afraid of each other.*

*Great & quiet source of peace, quiet our fears. We are wary, uncertain, strung tight. Quiet our fears. We have no idea what the future will bring, but we do know you will be in our future to hold us there. We cannot quiet ourselves, O God. We cannot comfort ourselves, cannot heal ourselves, cannot help ourselves. All we can do is wash our hands & keep our distance. Our rocket science is no good to us for this threat.*

*O God, great & quiet source of peace, quiet us, your anxious ones, & let us cling for comfort to your suffering Son, Jesus Christ. Gather us under his wings. Remind us that he suffers with us, but he's also the great physician. In him, let us not be afraid. Please, let us not be afraid. Amen.*

### FAITH CHAT:

1. Describe a time when someone did you a favour that you could never repay.
2. In your current circumstances, in what part of your life has God been teaching you to risk more?
3. How willing are you to lay everything in your life at the feet of Jesus who is willing to redeem you? What holds you back?

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

My kids think it odd that when I was their age I had to actually talk to a girl if I wanted to ask her out on a date. I either had to look her in the eye/make my intentions known **OR** pick up the phone, ring her house, risk talking to her mom/dad & have a conversation in which both our phones were attached to a wall in our homes & anyone who wanted to listen could hear most of what was being said. There was no messaging texting snapchat email...It was high stakes personal involvement if anything was going to transpire <sup>b/t</sup> likely interested parties. (or *disinterested* as was often the case)

In the world of Naomi, Ruth & Boaz...The stakes were even higher & the dynamics very different. Relationships were typically arranged/approved by parents, <sup>w/</sup> fathers doing the negotiating. Suitable candidates were being screened from the time a child was born & often there were no surprises when one family would announce the impending union <sup>b/t</sup> this son & that daughter. But for Naomi, Ruth & Boaz, all those SOPs went out the window when Elimelech/Mahlon/Killion died. There were no "fathers" to negotiate. No male household head to step in. No dowry to exchange. Ruth is a widow...a grieving widow working every day to keep herself & Naomi alive. She is a foreigner/not-an-Israelite. A pagan not a Jew. Her link to Israel is through her widowed mother-in-law & a gut-level commitment to Yahweh, Naomi's God.

Ruth & Naomi are the epitome of "damaged goods" in the eyes of the world but to God they are ripe to be recipients of his grace...Grace? Grace is the unmerited, undeserved kindness/favour of God brought to bear on someone's life... Grace is active on behalf of someone else for their good that they do not deserve...As grace increases, the distance between people & the Father decreases. It is by grace alone that God draws us to him. And as we have seen over these last weeks grace is not just good & nice things done for someone else...Grace has the power to transform lives. *One day Naomi said to Ruth, "My daughter, it's time that I found a permanent home for you, so that you will be provided for.* This is the same Naomi who wanted to change her name to Mara/"bitterness" because her sense was that God had turned his heart against her & become her adversary. Her bitter worldview is now changed. She is making plans, hopeful secure joyful plans for the future. Through the steadfast faithfulness of Ruth & the abundant kindness & generosity of Boaz Naomi has begun to see that God is still at work in her life for her good & his glory...AND she sees Ruth, who has not failed to care for her & the family/kinsman-redeemer Boaz are agents of Yahweh's steadfast love – his grace - for her.

So Naomi lays out a plan for Ruth & Boaz to have some "alone time" where he can fully comprehend the opportunity before him to gain a magnificent wife as well as the land holdings that would naturally have belonged to her dead husband. The instructions are simple. Bathe. Dress in something besides widow's garments. Splash on some perfume. Find where Boaz will be sleeping during the threshing party & lay down at his feet after you have moved his blankets so the night air will wake him up & he'll see you. But here's the question...

How do you know when grief is over? Is it ever over? Or is it "over enough" the day you begin to believe God has more in store for you than tears & memories, struggle & loneliness? Whatever else Naomi is telling Ruth, it's clear she is giving her permission to move on from the death of Naomi's son...to allow God to unwrap her mourning so he could eventually clothe her with joy. *1 Chron 16:30-34: Let all the earth tremble before him. The world stands firm & cannot be shaken. Let the heavens be glad, & the earth rejoice! Tell all the nations, "The Lord reigns!" Let the sea & everything in it shout his praise! Let the fields & their crops burst out with joy! Let the trees of the forest sing for joy before the Lord, for he is coming to judge the earth. Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good! His faithful love endures forever.* God's sovereignty is not disturbed by our traumas & tragedies here in this life. His ultimate plan is for our joy in his presence.

Naomi is beginning to trust God has hold of their lives for good not for sorrow...for blessing not for pain. The secret drama under cover of darkness on the threshing floor opens the doorway for Boaz & Ruth to discover the fullness & ultimate joy of God's hand upon their lives. Boaz continues to act honourably as he knows he is not really next in line to redeem, to become the rescuer for Naomi & Ruth, but he declares that if no one else will...then he will. And what comes next is crucial...He seeks not his will & desires, but that which honours God, & blesses Ruth.

According to OT Law...the family/kinsman redeemer had to meet 3 specific criteria or he had no share in the family holdings. Remember, land was given to a family by God in perpetuity...it was always theirs & to renounce your claim on your land was to renounce your place among God's people. Land & your place in it was not some mystical "connection" it was a specific gift from the Father to you where he would live with you. So when there was no male head of household to carry on the living stewardship of God's gift responsive to the presence of God the next closest male relative could redeem that place among God's people for his family. Boaz knows he must meet that specific set of requirements to rescue Naomi/Ruth from a life of grinding poverty, hard daily drudgery & no real future beyond bitter toil & death.

## Those requirements...

1<sup>st</sup>...The redeemer must be related to those he seeks to redeem. He must share the bloodline of those in danger/at risk.

2<sup>nd</sup>...The redeemer must be able to pay the cost of absorbing into his household those he redeems. That great responsibility comes at a great price. Is he able to pay?

3<sup>rd</sup>...The redeemer must be willing to do what is required to redeem. Not everyone is willing to expend themselves for the sake of someone else, not even for family members. Is the redeemer willing to do whatever it takes to pull someone in need to safety from their plight?

In Boaz's case the first 2 are obvious. Naomi & Boaz both know his place in the family tree **and** he clearly is a man of great financial means. He is related & he is able. But will he? Is he willing to extend his "wings" to care for these two wandering destitute women? Is he willing to go to whatever length to bring these wanderers home once & for all? Is he willing to restore those who had no right to a place at the table among God's people? Boaz answers that himself.

*"As surely as the Lord lives, I will redeem you myself."* – Ruth 3:13c

That's not just a promise to Ruth. It's the promise of Christ to all whom he calls brothers & sisters. It's the commitment of the Redeemer to do whatever it takes, pay whatever the cost, to claim for the Father all trapped in sin & death and who live under the burden of fear, grief, shame & brokenness. From the beginning...whenever you've felt forgotten, invisible, as if no one can understand or deal with your life but you: God has been holding you, leading you, & working in you for his glory. Christ has died for you. He is risen for you. He sent his Spirit to lead you back to the Father. The mystery & certainty of God's grace & mercy is always at work to draw us back into his arms bringing fullness from our desolation and blessing from our bitterness.

Here's where today's opportunity gets exciting...I'll stop here & we'll pray & sing one last song. Then I'll leave you a list of Scripture verses...that demonstrate just how Jesus fits the requirement of our Redeemer...As Boaz acts for Ruth/Naomi, Jesus acts for you for me for the whole creation. These verses are on those materials on our website. Might be looking at 'em right now. In your groups in your homes read through those & discuss what that means **FOR YOU**. Work through those materials as you are once again reminded...

*"With his own blood—not the blood of goats and calves—Jesus Christ entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever."* – Hebrews 9:12

1<sup>st</sup>...Jesus is related to those he seeks to redeem: **Hebrews 2:14-15, 17** - *Because God's children are human beings—made of flesh & blood—the Son also became flesh & blood. For only as a human being could he die, & only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death. Only in this way could he set free all who have lived their lives as slaves to the fear of dying...it was necessary for him to be made in every respect like us, his brothers & sisters, so that he could be our merciful & faithful High Priest before God. Then he could offer a sacrifice that would take away the sins of the people.*

2<sup>nd</sup>...Jesus is able to pay the cost of our redemption: **1 Peter 1:18-20** - *For you know God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. It was not paid with mere gold or silver, which lose their value. It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. God chose him as your ransom long before the world began...*

**Revelation 5:9** - *"You are worthy to take the scroll & break its seals & open it. For you were slaughtered, & your blood has ransomed people for God from every tribe & language & people & nation.*

**Ephesians 1:4-7** - *Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. 5 God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure. 6 So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son. 7 He is so rich in kindness and grace that he purchased our freedom with the blood of his Son and forgave our sins.*

3<sup>rd</sup>...only Jesus is willing to do what is required to redeem you **AND** He has done it: **Galatians 3:13** - *Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing.*

**John 10:11-15, 18** – *Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don't belong to him & he isn't their shepherd. So the wolf attacks them & scatters the flock. The hired hand runs away because he's working only for the money & doesn't really care about the sheep. I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, & they know me, just as my Father knows me & I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep...No one can take my life from me. I sacrifice it voluntarily. For I have the authority to lay it down & also to take it up again. For this is what my Father has commanded."*

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

I'll also leave you with 4 others as a foretaste of that blessing that never ends. Hear them as your assurance/certainty  
*For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you & not to harm you, plans to give you hope & a future. Then you will call on me & come & pray to me, & I will listen to you. You will seek me & find me when you seek me with all your heart. – Jeremiah 29:11-13*

*The Lord is not slow about his promise, as some think of slowness, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish, but all to come to repentance. – 2 Peter 3:9*

*I have swept away your sins like a cloud. I have scattered your offenses like the morning mist. Oh, return to me, for I have paid the price to set you free. – Isaiah 44:22*

*"With his own blood—not the blood of goats and calves—Jesus Christ entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever." – Hebrews 9:12*