

WELCOME 5th July 2020 – 5 Pentecost '20 A

Ruth 4

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!

We're continuing to adapt our worship in this season...Again today there are more Group Study/Discussion resources available for you on our website & I hope you've got those handy. Our on-line 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. Our aim is to equip 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...**

"Happily ever after" In children's books; maybe. In our lives; not so much.

We don't often see a real-life tale of rebellion, brokenness, heartache, homelessness, desperation, risk & danger end with shouts of joy, jubilation & praise.

But what we find in the account of Ruth isn't a fairy-tale ending but God at work in the not-so-happy circumstances of life to bring fullness from desolation & blessing from bitterness. We see again & again the assurance that God's hand of grace & mercy are always holding, always leading, & always working for his glory & our good.

The mystery & certainty of God's grace is relentless to form in us & pour out on us love unlimited, joy unbounded & life unending. God's purpose in the midst of rebellion, brokenness & not-so-happy-ness is to heal, restore, redeem & rescue us and all creation so we might enjoy life in his presence & the pleasure of living with him forever.

We'll continue exploring that today...as we experience the '**SWEETNESS OF REDEMPTION**' wrapping up our study on 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: *(Richard Bott)*

Father, when we aren't sure, help us be calm; when information comes from all sides, correct and not, help us be wise to discern; when fear makes it hard to breathe, and anxiety seems to be the order of the day, slow us down. God; help us to reach out with our hearts, when we can't touch with our hands; help us to be socially connected, when the world says "Be socially distant." Help us to love as perfectly as we can, knowing that "perfect love casts out all fear," & in the perfect love of your Son Jesus lead us into perfect freedom from all that would steal kill or destroy and life abundant forever. In Jesus' Name...Amen.

FAITH CHAT:

1. What's the biggest risk you've ever taken? Why?
2. What would make someone think they aren't "enough" to be loved by God or effective for God's purposes?
3. When you reflect on the book of Ruth...What in that account draws you closer to the Father or helps you turn more of your life over to Him to work in you?

BIBLES

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

'I love it when a plan comes together.' The stock phrase of Col. John "Hannibal" Smith, the fictional TV/movie character in the 70's series the 'A Team'. That was his expression of supreme confidence that his 'A Team' would get the bad guys, thwart the evil scheme, or halt the terrorists/drug runners/coup plotters. The problem was he most often uttered those words when it looked like the "plan" had gone off the rails, his 'Team' had been captured or the plotters had foiled his counter-plot. His supreme confidence in that moment looked ridiculous.

In the world of Naomi, Ruth & Boaz...You'd be hard-pressed to think any 'plan' was in place & moving toward a suitable positive outcome. A world of chaos, famine, refugees seeking a better life in an unfriendly country only to experience death after death after death...homelessness risk danger bitter grief nearing hopelessness...Who plans for that?

Well...No one. And in *NO WAY* is that **God's** plan for his human creations whom he formed in his image to live in his presence & share his love & care for his world. But too often...**THAT IS** our experience. In a world corrupted by sin...broken by human rebellion against the Father...warped by our declarations of autonomy & self-determination instead of submission & responsiveness to God...chaos famine grief death hopelessness is too often the order of the day. But what we discover in the midst of that is that God indeed has had a plan all along...a plan to restore – a plan to redeem – a plan to rescue & recreate all things according to his original plan purpose & design...according to his desire to bring into existence a world of love & joy...harmony & peace...what the Bible calls Shalom where all things are right as they should be & all relationships filled with abundant good.

Ruth 4, the last chapter of this account, starts where Ruth 3 stopped...Ruth has been working in Boaz's field to provide food for herself & Naomi. Both are widowed...Naomi's husband Elimelech & his son Mahlon (Ruth's husband) died far from home in Ruth's homeland of Moab. Knowing their only future, as uncertain & risky as it is, lies in Israel Ruth/Naomi return to the last place Naomi & Elimelech lived: Bethlehem. Ruth works daily among Boaz's harvesters to secure enough food to keep the 2 widows alive. But as the harvest ends, Naomi knows their future is unsecured if they live day-to-day hand-to-mouth. So Naomi send Ruth to the threshing floor to engineer a private moment where Ruth can declare to the older Boaz her availability for marriage if he is interested. He can be for her & Naomi, their family redeemer & raise for Naomi & child through Ruth to carry on Elimelech's family name & one day inherit his land holdings.

Boaz knows he is not next in line to serve Naomi & Ruth in that way. There is a man closer in the lineage who could if he is willing. What we read in this chapter is how that decision-making negotiating process of who will redeem & rescue these 2 women & further Elimelech's family name is carried out. The process is simple. Boaz calls the man over to the city gate where all legal proceedings of this sort would have been transacted & lays out for the other man his options.

2 things: 1st the Hebrew text obscures this man's name...literally it reads "*Come over here & sit down 'you-whom-I-will-not-name.'*" His identity is deliberately hidden. 2nd when he thinks he's going to get a chunk of land to use as if it were his own until Naomi died then it really is his...no heirs to Elimelech to contest him taking over, he's all for it. But when he discovers he's going to invest his Super into a piece of land he can't keep forever, it must be given back to any heirs of Elimelech at the Jubilee **AND** he's got to raise up those heirs for Elimelech through the Moabite widow. No thanks. Deal's off.

Note this...Mr. *whom-I-will-not-name* was interested in helping Naomi only if it increased his riches & his reputation. But he didn't want to impair his inheritance. Once he realized buying the land was going to cost him \$\$\$ he would never recoup & force him to marry a nasty ol' Moabite & wear the social stigma of raising children w/ her, he wanted nothing to do w/ fulfilling his obligation as family redeemer because it detracted from his reputation & legacy. But what happened? He who sought to preserve his reputation & his legacy remains unknown...we never know his name. In that moment when he *does what seems right in his own eyes* he forfeits that which was most precious to him...his name. And Boaz, who does both what is costly **AND** obedient we remember forever. Who here has paid the higher price? gained less? When you say "yes" to God you become part of his eternal plan & who knows what might result in you...

Remember last week we said a family redeemer must be related to those he seeks to redeem. He must be able to pay the cost of absorbing into his household those he redeems. Great responsibility comes at great price. He must be willing to do what is required to redeem. Not everyone is willing to expend themselves for the sake of someone else. Mr *whom-I-will-not-name* cleared the 1st 2 hurdles but fell at the 3rd. Boaz willingly & joyfully honours God & protects/preserves the family of Elimelech by taking Ruth as his wife & Naomi into his house.

But now the story gets even more exciting...and we see God's plan come together. *Then the elders & all the people standing in the gate replied, "We are witnesses! May the Lord make this woman who is coming into your home like Rachel & Leah, from whom all the nation of Israel descended! May you prosper in Ephrathah & be famous in Bethlehem. May the Lord give you descendants by this young woman who will be like those of our ancestor Perez, the son of Tamar & Judah."*

A little OT history... & some pretty sordid history it is. Check out the “blessings” the witnesses offer Boaz/Ruth. *May the Lord make this woman who is coming into your home like Rachel & Leah... May the Lord give you descendants by this young woman who will be like those of our ancestor Perez, the son of Tamar & Judah.* Rachel & Leah were sisters who were the wives of Jacob the father of the 12 tribes of Israel. Jacob was tricked into marrying Leah the older sister when he had worked 7 years to marry Rachel the woman he truly loved. There then erupted a baby-making rivalry ^{b/t} the 2 women. Trickery. Betrayal. Rivalry. Competing for love. Who wants that in their family tree? Who sees that as a “blessing” to offer a couple about to be married? Just wait... It gets worse... Tamar was Judah’s daughter-in-law. Her husband died & the family redeemer next son Onan refused (like the unnamed man here) to raise up a family in the name of his deceased brother & Judah failed to offer her to the next youngest. So Tamar tricked Judah into an illicit relationship & bore Perez. Can someone just say, “lck?” We’re not done yet... Mt 1 lists the ancestral lineage of Jesus. In that we read: *Salmon was the father of Boaz (whose mother was Rahab).* Rahab was a prostitute. Maybe that’s why Boaz was so open to Ruth & Naomi... he knew what it was like to have a questionable background... he understood being an outsider... he knew how it felt to be noticed for something over which you had no control...

Ok... so let’s stop right there... Trickery. Betrayal. Rivalry. Competing for love. Illicit relationships. Ethical lapses. Moral collapses. Failure across generations... Sounds awful. Disastrous. But into THAT family tree Jesus is born. From THAT dog’s breakfast the Saviour of the world emerges. From Bethlehem this cry rises as Obed is born to Boaz & Ruth: *“Praise the Lord, who has now provided a redeemer for your family!” Ruth 4:14a* In the darkest messiest of times, God advances his plan to rescue & restore & redeem & recreate all things.

In the most unlikely ways through the most unlikely people God moves in grace & mercy for the good of his world & the glory of his name, so we do not lose hope no matter how bad things look. Here’s the thing... What would ever make you think you could be excluded from God’s saving love? What ethical lapse, moral collapse, betrayal, suffering, tragedy, trauma, trickery, or deceit has convinced you God wants no part of your life? What makes you think you don’t belong in Christ’s family? What can separate you from Christ’s love for you? from his saving death & resurrection for you? Nothing

Titus 3:4-7 - When God our Savior revealed his kindness & love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth & new life through the Holy Spirit. He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior. Because of his grace he made us right in his sight & gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life.

Romans 5:8ff - When we were utterly helpless, Christ came at just the right time & died for us sinners... God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners... since our friendship with God was restored by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be saved through the life of his Son.

Galatians 4:4-7 - But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, “Abba, Father.” Now you are no longer a slave but God’s own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir.

The mystery & certainty of God’s grace is relentless to form in us & pour out on us love unlimited, joy unbounded & life unending. God’s purpose in the midst of rebellion, brokenness & not-so-happy-ness is to heal, restore, redeem & rescue us & all creation so we might enjoy life in his presence & the pleasure of living with him forever. Bitterness to blessing. Emptiness to abundant overflowing fullness. That’s God’s plan for you & it comes together in Jesus crucified, risen & ruling. The Father invites you to be part of his Kingdom plan coming together for the world, to reclaim & bring blessing to everyone you know everywhere you are... When you say “yes” to God you become part of his eternal plan & who knows what might result in you...

Here’s where today’s opportunity gets exciting... I’ll stop here & we’ll sing one last song. I’ll leave you to pray together explore the Scriptures & Discussion material together & commune together... maybe share lunch or find some way to extend worship into the rest of your day

I’ll also leave you with 3 Scriptures as a foretaste of that blessing that never ends. Hear them as your assurance/certainty

You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence & the pleasures of living with you forever.

– Psalm 16:11

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

The Lord has told you, what is good; & what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, & to walk humbly with your God? – Micah 6:8