



Ruth 2: Breaking, Blessing, Belonging

A Preacher-led style of worship to
guide reflections
on 26 July 2020

Welcome

Today is the second week in our Bible Month four-week study of the Book of Ruth. We are looking at Chapter 2 and focus especially on the part that Boaz plays as he joins the story. As we saw last week this is a story in which we meet ordinary people, facing the challenges of their time, and responding in extraordinary ways. The story develops, Naomi & Ruth are still centre stage, but Boaz is the new character we meet. He is a wealthy farmer, an ordinary man, and yet with responsibilities as others work the land that is his. His responses develop our story of the loving kindness of God.

Call to Worship

Made in your image, every single one. Knit together, every single one. Called into being, every single one. As we come together may we greet all your children by name alone. **Amen.**

We sing of the glory of God

Hymn – The splendour of the king – Singing the Faith 15

The splendour of a King,
clothed in majesty
Let all the Earth rejoice
All the Earth rejoice

He wraps himself in light
And darkness tries to hide
And trembles at His voice
Trembles at His voice

*How great is our God, sing with
me*

*How great is our God, and all
will see*

*How great, how great is our
God*

Age to age He stands
And time is in His hands
Beginning and the end

The Godhead Three in One
Father Spirit Son
The Lion and the Lamb
The Lion and the Lamb

How great is our God, sing with me

How great is our God, and all will see

How great, how great is our God

Name above all names
Worthy of our praise
My heart will sing
How great is our God

You're the name above all names

You are worthy of our praise
And my heart will sing
How great is our God

How great..

Chris Tomlin (b 1972), Ed Cash & Jesse Reeves

Reading: Ruth 2

Ruth Works in the Field of Boaz

2 Naomi had a relative named Boaz, a rich and influential man who belonged to the family of her husband Elimelech. ² One day Ruth said to Naomi, "Let me go to the fields to gather the grain that the harvest workers leave. I am sure to find someone who will let me work with him."

Naomi answered, "Go ahead, daughter."

³ So Ruth went out to the fields and walked behind the workers, picking up the heads of grain which they left. It so happened that she was in a field that belonged to Boaz.

⁴ Some time later Boaz himself arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the workers. "The LORD be with you!" he said. "The LORD bless you!" they answered.

⁵ Boaz asked the man in charge, "Who is that young woman?"

⁶ The man answered, "She is the foreigner who came back from Moab with Naomi. ⁷ She asked me to let her follow the workers and gather grain. She has been working since early morning and has just now stopped to rest for a while under the shelter."

⁸ Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Let me give you some advice. Don't gather grain anywhere except in this field. Work with the women here; ⁹ watch them to see where they are reaping and stay with them. I have ordered my men not to molest you. And whenever

you are thirsty, go and drink from the water jars that they have filled.”

10 Ruth bowed down with her face touching the ground, and said to Boaz, “Why should you be so concerned about me? Why should you be so kind to a foreigner?”

11 Boaz answered, “I have heard about everything that you have done for your mother-in-law since your husband died. I know how you left your father and mother and your own country and how you came to live among a people you had never known before. **12** May the LORD reward you for what you have done. May you have a full reward from the LORD God of Israel, to whom you have come for protection!”

13 Ruth answered, “You are very kind^[a] to me, sir. You have made me feel better by speaking gently to me, even though I am not the equal of one of your servants.”

14 At mealtime Boaz said to Ruth, “Come and have a piece of bread, and dip it in the sauce.” So she sat with the workers, and Boaz passed some roasted grain to her. She ate until she was satisfied, and she still had some food left over. **15-16** After she had left to go and gather grain, Boaz ordered the workers, “Let her gather grain even where the bundles are lying, and don't say anything to stop her. Besides that, pull out some heads of grain from the bundles and leave them for her to pick up.”

17 So Ruth gathered grain in the field until evening, and when she had beaten it out, she found she had nearly twenty-five pounds. **18** She took the grain back into town and showed her mother-in-law how much she had gathered. She also gave her the food left over from the meal. **19** Naomi asked her, “Where did you gather all this grain today? Whose field have you been working in? May God bless the man who took an interest in you!” So Ruth told Naomi that she had been working in a field belonging to a man named Boaz.

20 “May the LORD bless Boaz!” Naomi exclaimed. “The LORD always keeps his promises to the living and the dead.” And she went on, “That man is a close relative of ours, one of those responsible for taking care of us.”

21 Then Ruth said, “Best of all, he told me to keep gathering grain with his workers until they finish the harvest.”

22 Naomi said to Ruth, “Yes, daughter, it will be better for you to work with the women in Boaz' field. You might be molested if you

went to someone else's field." ²³ So Ruth worked with them and gathered grain until all the barley and wheat had been harvested. And she continued to live with her mother-in-law.

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Comment

As we re-join our story Naomi and Ruth remain at the heart of the narrative but are isolated and in need. Although Naomi has a kinsman, Boaz, who is rich and influential he has not yet reached out to them. Ruth takes matters into her own hands and takes up her right to glean, stepping out in faith. She arrives in one of Boaz's fields where the workers follow the instructions in Leviticus (Lev 19:9-10), "When you harvest your fields, do not cut the corn at the edges of the fields, and do not go back to cut the ears of corn that were left; leave them for poor people and foreigners." Ruth, however, asks to follow the workers and pick up the corn, something beyond the right of the poor when gleaning.

Boaz arrives and asks who this young woman is. The supervisor identifies her as a foreigner from Moab, albeit one who is working hard! Boaz gives Ruth three pieces of advice. She should only work in that field, work with the women and steer clear of the young men who might molest her. Why Boaz does this is not clear, perhaps out of civic duty as he is an honourable man, perhaps because he has found out she is a relative.

Ruth's reaction to Boaz's kindness is deferential, she is puzzled why he should treat a foreigner so well. Boaz explains how he has heard of what Ruth has done for Naomi over the years in Moab and now in Bethlehem. He identifies the Lord God of Israel as her protector. He mirrors this with his practical support and kindness, inviting Ruth to eat with him and the workers at midday, and giving the workers instructions so that what Ruth gathers to take home to Naomi is greater than it would have otherwise been.

When Ruth goes home that evening to Naomi, with all the grain and left-over food from the midday meal, Naomi is surprised and delighted. She asks whose field Ruth has been working in to glean such abundance. When Ruth identifies Boaz, Naomi is full of

blessings for him, identifying him as a relative and acknowledging the protective wisdom of his advice to Ruth.

And this was not a one-day wonder! Ruth continued to work in Boaz's field until the harvest was finished, and she continued to live with Naomi.

This is a story of loving kindness in which rules are broken, Ruth and Naomi are blessed, and their right of belonging is recognised. It is also one of responsibility. Boaz, as a kinsman of Naomi and Ruth, had a responsibility in the Law to support them (Leviticus 25:25-55). The Hebrew word for this was *go'el* the meaning of which is, perhaps, deeper in that the right and responsibility that Boaz had was to *redeem* his relatives at risk. The ultimate redeemer is God but there are practical considerations which Boaz addresses in the story.

The events in the story happened many centuries ago in a quite different place and a vastly different society. And yet they have strong resonances for us today. Perhaps we can see these resonances by posing questions for reflection, recognising the need also for action in response.

- *How do we welcome strangers, especially those who are vulnerable such as seasonal workers or undocumented migrants?*
- *What might Ruth have to teach us about seeking justice for ourselves and others?*
- *How does our faith in God offer us refuge, and the boldness to step out?*
- *How should we seek to act justly, showing God's loving kindness to all, no matter who they are or where they come from?*

As we reflect on these questions perhaps, we might place them here in events in our own country but also elsewhere in the world. There are many places where the loving kindness of God, and, in practical terms, today's Boazes, male and female, individual and corporate, are sorely needed.

To aid these reflections perhaps read the words of this hymn or, if you have the ability to, listen to it through the link provided.

Hymn – Let love be real – StF 615

<https://youtu.be/SkBAXZw5NxU?t=17>

Let love be real, in giving and receiving,
without the need to manage and to own;
a haven free from posing and pretending,
where every weakness may be safely known.
Give me your hand, along the desert pathway,
give me your love wherever we may go:
*as God loves us, so let us love each other,
with no demands, just open hands and space to grow.*

Let love be real, not grasping or confining,
that strange embrace that holds yet sets us free;
that helps us face the risk of truly living,
and makes us brave to be what we might be.
Give me your strength when all my words are weakness,
give me your love in spite of all you know:
*as God loves us, so let us love each other,
with no demands, just open hands and space to grow.*

Let love be real, with no manipulation,
no secret wish to harness or control;
let us accept each other 's incompleteness,
and share the joy of learning to be whole.
Give me your hope through dreams and disappointments,
give me your trust when all my failings show:
*as God loves us, so let us love each other,
with no demands, just open hands and space to grow.*

Michael Forster (b 1946)

Prayers for others

Lord, as we read of this story of your loving kindness bringing a sense of blessing and belonging, we remember those who have neither:

- Those in need of safety and shelter, here and elsewhere in the world.

- Those in need of food and water, especially in refugee camps.
- Those with physical and mental health needs.
- Those facing loss of work and income.
- Those lost and bewildered and not knowing where to turn.

Hold them all in your hands of love and compassion. And we pray for ourselves as we seek to show your love and blessings in these difficult times.

As always, in Jesus name we pray: **The Lord's Prayer**

Our Father in heaven, may your holy name be honoured; may your Kingdom come; may your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us today the food we need.

Forgive us the wrongs we have done, as we forgive the wrongs that others have done to us. Save us from the time of trial; and keep us safe from evil.

For the kingdom, the power and the glory are yours, now and for ever. Amen

Hymn: For the healing of the nations – StF 696

For the healing of the nations,
 Lord, we pray with one accord,
 for a just and equal sharing
 of the things that earth affords.
 To a life of love in action
 help us rise and pledge our word.

Lead us forward into freedom,
 from despair your world release,
 that, redeemed from war and hatred,
 all may come and go in peace.
 Show us how through care and goodness
 fear will die and hope increase.

All that kills abundant living,
 let it from the earth be banned:
 pride of status, race or schooling,
 dogmas that obscure your plan.

In our common quest for justice
may we hallow brief life's span.

You, Creator God, have written
your great name on humankind;
for our growing in your likeness
bring the life of Christ to mind;
that by our response and service
earth its destiny may find.

Fred Kahn (1929-2009)

Blessing

May God write a message upon our hearts, bless, and direct us
and send us out living letters of the Word.

Amen

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