

God's Right of Redemption  
Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17

One of the things that puzzles me about this text is the very fact that the Bible takes time out of its crowded narrative to focus on the small details concerning the lives of a woman and her daughter-in-law. There are no grand miracles that take place in this story. There is no flood that is coming to destroy the world. There are no plagues of locusts or giant bodies of water that must be crossed to let a whole nation of people escape from slavery. No giants that must be slain by children. And no huge fish swallowing prophets whole before spitting them back up on dry land.

It puzzles me. I can't help but wonder why something that could have easily been handled with just another series of "begats" - a genealogy - is played out in these four short chapters and placed among the books of Law, and great histories of nations, and books filled with words of wisdom and prophecy. And here is the story about Ruth...God takes no action in the book of Ruth and no prophecies are proclaimed. But does that mean that there is no word for us to hear from this scripture?...Obviously not, or I would simply be wasting your time with this message...

Remember Paul Harvey? He was a newscaster known for presenting little-known or forgotten facts on a variety of subjects with some key element of the story held back until the end. He would tell what seemed to be the whole story then break for a commercial. After the commercial he would say, "And now for the rest of the story!" and then complete the story to the surprise of all his listeners. So, Pastor Lynne brought the first part of the story last week, "And now here is the rest of the story"!

There is a word here for us to hear, and that word comes to us through the actions and words of Ruth...the Moabite. We see it in her a remarkable, her magnificent example of faithfulness – as we heard in Pastor Lynne's message last week. In Ruth, we see how this story becomes so important that it needs to be included among all the other signs,

wonders, and prophecy of the Bible. We see how life that is lived out, following God's way, has a very real impact on how people encounter and care for one another throughout their lives. So, if a story is about how people follow in the way of the Lord, then it logically is also a story about the way of the Lord. Now, to grasp this / to understand this we must look at the intimate moment that we usually skip over - that we unintentionally/intentionally (?) skip over because it might be a tad too racy for us to read aloud in church.

So, today, we heard how Ruth is instructed to go to Boaz in the middle of the night...What we skipped over in our reading, what we didn't read, is the actual encounter that Ruth has with Boaz, and that is precisely where we hear a word of life that gives us hope in the midst of the hopeless times of our lives. So much snickering can happen when all we focus on in Ruth's midnight encounter, is how Ruth uncovers and lays at Boaz's feet. That means that they're having sex, right!?!...Not necessarily so. I believe that there is something definitely intimate going on here between these two. However, to reduce it down only to the tawdry, the sleazy misses the point of what's actually going on here. It's not interesting to me whether they had sex. What's interesting is that, when Boaz wakes up and sees Ruth lying beside him, she makes the bold demand that Boaz should "spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are the guardian-redeemer of our family" Guardian-redeemer is the NIV translation. Most biblical translations are "next-of-kin" (Ruth 3:9). What must be noted is that the Hebrew word used for "guardian-redeemer" or "next-of-kin" is *go-el*. *Go-el* means so much more than next of kin and is why guardian-redeemer is a better translation. We know this because of how *go-el* is used in other parts of Hebrew Scripture that we are most likely familiar with.

One such place that *go-el* appears is in the book of Job (19:25) where Job declares clearly to his friends who have gathered to sit with him in the ashes, in the hopelessness of his life and says, "I know that my *Go-el* lives!" We know it better as "I know that my

*Redeemer lives!*" In Job's case, while this statement, "I know that my Redeemer lives!" is a declaration of faith, it is also possibly a word of accusation against God - calling God to be the one who restores life, who gives us hope in the midst of our ashes, and who should be the one who brings justice and not punishment. This statement of faith brings God to task and demands that God indeed be the one who guards and protects us in our life.

You see, redeemers have a responsibility to be ones who protect us from economic and physical violence. Redeemers, according to the law, are the next of kin who guard and protect us when we are vulnerable. And when Ruth asks that Boaz would spread his cloak over her, she is reminding him that it is his duty to guard and protect her, as she and Naomi have lost everything and have returned as women who must glean the scraps of the harvest to survive. Boaz must either accept the request, find another next of kin (who rejects the right), or knowingly abandon this woman and her mother in their time of need, in their time of hopelessness.

This story then becomes extremely important to the overall narrative of the history of God's people. It becomes the example of how one should follow in the way of the Lord...It becomes the very lineage of the promised king, the Messiah, who will lead God's people in prosperity. It shows us that redemption is indeed the way of the Lord. It even becomes the very way of the Lord when God becomes flesh and walks the way of the cross for the sake - and for the redemption of all of creation. It is significant, it is telling that scripture so carefully places this story in the very midst of Jesus' lineage. It helps us to see that even when faced with the choice of whether to claim the right of redemption of the whole of creation, Jesus chose the way of life, of restoration, and of the very forgiveness of our sins. Jesus will not turn away from us, even though we just might turn away from him. He will cover us with the cloak of his protection that guards and guides us through our life.

In Ruth, we see this example of steadfastness and faithfulness even when she couldn't have been blamed for abandoning her mother-in-law. We see that this is what it means to follow in the way of the Lord. In Jesus, we finally see the way of the Lord walking upon the earth, and that way is assuredly the way of redemption. Amen.

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Hatfield Church of the Brethren