

## Introduction

I promised you last week that we didn't just name our dog Ruth so that I would have sermon illustrations for you from the Book of Ruth. But I didn't promise that I wouldn't use my dog to create sermon illustrations, either. This week, Cassie and I have been establishing trust with our dog. We've been interacting with her, training her, and making her comfortable in our home so that she can trust us and we can trust her. One example is that she is afraid of our bathtub. That's not good, because we need to bathe her. So we've taken her into the bathroom and gotten her comfortable with it, lifted her into the tub without any water so she trusts it, and this afternoon, we are going to finally give her that bath. Pray for us.

I tell you this because trust is at the foundation of the third chapter of Ruth. Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz have to trust one another for the ultimate goal of redemption to progress. That trust is built and maintained by *hesed*, that faithful, loyal love that these three people share and demonstrate. As we learn from Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz this morning, think of how they are trustworthy and trusting, and how we can learn from their example.

## Chapter 3 Summary

### *Naomi's Advice*

The story of Ruth is one that transcends culture and time. It's a story about three different people who demonstrate God's faithful, loyal love to one another. It's a story of losing everything, of perseverance in the face of loss, of holding onto slivers of hope, and ultimately of redemption. But this week, we find a scene in this story that is so odd to us in 21<sup>st</sup> century America.

So, let me begin by doing some cultural translation of what's going on in chapter 3, because on the surface it looks a little odd to us. Naomi tells Ruth what to do again. Naomi instructed Ruth to glean in chapter 2, and that worked out great. Ruth and Naomi trust each other. So Ruth listens. Naomi tells her to appear as best she can and to go to Boaz in the middle of the night, after he's done winding down from the long day on the threshing floor. Threshing is the process of separating the edible parts of wheat or barley from the inedible parts that it grows in. So this is a later step in the harvesting process. Now, why she tells Ruth to uncover Boaz's feet, I don't know. There are a lot of theories, and for the arc of the story, it's probably not crucial. If you're interested in hearing about the different theories, you can talk to me after. Or google it.

So Ruth follows Naomi's advice, and takes it a step further. She sneaks into the threshing floor after Boaz fell asleep, uncovers his feet and lies down, just like Naomi said. Naomi told Ruth that Boaz would know what to do after that. Naomi trusted him to know what to do.

### *Ruth adds to Plan*

Now let me pause – this part of the story is really weird. It's ok to think it's weird. Again, this is not a scene we understand in 21<sup>st</sup> century America. So let's continue.

As you'd expect, Boaz is alarmed. Who are you? He says, and Ruth answers "I am Ruth, your servant; spread your cloak over your servant, for you are next-of-kin." There's that word, the word we talked about last week that means kin redeemer. Ruth knows that Boaz can redeem the situation, and she is asking him to do that. "Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you." Ruth is asking, searching, and knocking for redemption for her and Naomi. But, what does the cloak have to do with that? We

understand that Boaz is the kin redeemer, but why ask him to put her cloak over her? Hey Boaz, you're my kin redeemer, so let's play peekaboo with your cloak. It seems random to us here in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

It seems random, but what Ruth just said is actually very serious, very bold, and very, very unusual. To put one's cloak over another person is a symbol of marriage. In Ezekiel 16 God says that he puts his cloak over us as he creates a covenant like a marriage with us. This part is too good. Naomi tells her to go to Boaz in the middle of the night – if you asked me to sneak up on someone while they're sleeping, I would probably say no. But Ruth takes it a step further and proposes! She asks Boaz to marry her. I can't imagine that's how Naomi saw this going. Ruth takes matters into her own hands and says, you know what, you are the person who can redeem me and my mother-in-law, and if we get married, that will definitely happen. So let's get married, put your cloak over me.

### *Bold and Unusual*

Here's why that's so bold and so unusual. There are, among others, four reasons why this is unusual according to the culture. First, this is a woman asking a man to marry her. That didn't happen. Second, this is a servant asking the owner of the land on which the servant is working to marry her. That didn't happen. Third, this is a significantly younger person asking an older person to marry her. That didn't happen. Fourth, this is a foreigner in Israel asking an Israelite to marry her. That didn't happen. Ruth is so bold, and tells Boaz to play his hand. Boaz, she is saying, you could redeem us, will you do so? Will you marry me and make that redemption full and official?

How is Boaz going to respond? Is he going to take offense that this foreign, younger, servant woman is proposing to him? In that day, it

would have made sense for him to be upset. Also, remember that he just got startled awake in the middle of the night after a long day of threshing. He could have been insulted, he could have banished her from his field, from his life, from any opportunity for redemption. Instead, he says this:

### *Boaz's Response*

“May you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter; this last instance of your loyalty (*hesed*) is better than the first; you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich. <sup>11</sup> And now, my daughter, do not be afraid, I will do for you all that you ask, for all the assembly of my people know that you are a worthy woman.”

He blesses her – just like last week when we talked about Boaz asking God to bless Ruth, and then allowing God to use him to bless Ruth. He does so here again. Then he says that this act of *hesed*, of faithful, loyal love is even greater than her others. And he ends by telling her that she is a worthy woman. This same word was used a chapter before to describe Boaz as a prominent rich man. Boaz sees that Ruth is full of faithful, loyal love and is a high-character person. He's not offended that she proposes. Instead he responds with joy and blessing.

### *Not so fast...*

But there's a catch! Boaz continues, “But now, though it is true that I am a near kinsman, there is another kinsman more closely related than I. <sup>13</sup> Remain this night, and in the morning, if he will act as next-of-kin for you, good; let him do it. If he is not willing to act as next-of-kin for you, then, as the Lord lives, I will act as next-of-kin for you. Lie down until the morning.”

Boaz might not be the kin redeemer after all. There is another who is in a closer position to be that next-of-kin redeemer. He does say that he'll act as the redeemer if this other person does not step up to the plate, but this is kind of sad, right? As we read Ruth, we want Boaz to be that redeemer. He's a good person, he loves God, he's wealthy, he's hard working. He's a perfect match, he would be a perfect kin redeemer. If this were a movie, we'd all be rooting for Boaz and Ruth to end up together. But that might not happen. Stay tuned next week to see what happens!

While we find out next week whether Boaz is indeed going to be the redeemer, and if he'll marry Ruth, we have two important lessons to learn from this chapter.

## **Threshing**

The first lesson is a combination of what we learn in Ruth 3 and Matthew 7, as was read earlier. Matthew 7:7-8, "Ask, and it will be given you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you. For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened." Naomi knew the power of asking, searching, and knocking when she gave Ruth the plan of action. Ruth knew the power of asking, searching, and knocking when she took Naomi's plan and made it her own by asking Boaz to marry her instead of waiting to see what he did or said.

We are called to ask, search, and knock. I don't know why this is one of my more vivid childhood memories, probably because it involved food, but I remember very well one day I was in the car with my mom, I could even show you in San Diego the very intersection we were at, and I said, "Hey mom, can we go to McDonald's for dinner tonight?" Now, my mom wasn't a fan of taking me out to fast food. I remember asking

that and thinking, she's just going to say no. But I asked anyways. To my surprise, she said yes, and I was chowing down on a happy meal later that evening. Now that's a silly example, but it shows that when we ask, search, and knock, we can be surprised by others' responses. Maybe it's easier for kids. Now as an adult, it's more difficult. But I remember a few years back, I was in a situation where there was a lot of critique of me because of the conduct of someone working under me at another church. I was angry about the critique, I was angry that I heard about it through back channels, I was upset. So, I met with one of the leaders of this critique, and asked for forgiveness. Instead of an argument, that led to a constructive conversation about how to remedy the situation. I was scared to say sorry, but this person's response of forgiveness and constructive dialogue confirmed that asking, searching, and knocking – while scary – is indeed a good thing.

I think it's significant that this act of asking, searching, and knocking takes place on the threshing floor. In farming, God provides the sun, the water, the soil and its nutrients and bacteria and animal life, and the seed to make things grow. This is God's work. But the harvest, and the work that needs to be done to prepare that food – like threshing – is the work that God gives us. God provides us a job, and we are called to work faithfully. This job is not always a job that we traditionally think of, it could be being a faithful friend, parent, someone who prays for others, anything. God provides blessing, protection, all those good things, and it's our job to ask, search, and knock. God provides forgiveness, but we are still called to ask for it and repent. But I don't think we're just called to ask, search, and knock with God. We need to with others as well. Naomi and Ruth ask Boaz for redemption. They were honest and vulnerable about their need. We need to do the same. We live in a world where being honest and vulnerable about our needs is scary, or unwise if we want to climb whatever ladder we're trying to climb. Certainly, when we look at the political rhetoric in our country, nobody is giving the example of asking, searching, and knocking.

There's too much demanding, claiming, and breaking down doors. So we need to look at examples like Ruth and Naomi, and look to the teachings of Jesus to learn.

## **Trust**

The calling for us to ask, search, and knock is difficult. I think part of the difficulty stems from a lack of trust. We won't, or can't, trust many people with our needs and vulnerability. The second lesson in Ruth 3 is trust. Trust is the glue holding together Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz in the book of Ruth. They trust one another because of their faithful, loyal love. Naomi trusts Ruth to carry out her plan, and trusts Boaz to know what to do with this plan. Ruth trusts Naomi's wisdom in this plan, and trusts Boaz to accept her request of redemption. Boaz trusts Ruth enough to consider her outrageous marriage proposal and to be a kin redeemer to Ruth and Naomi. This teaches us that we need to trust one another and to be trustworthy to establish and hold that trust in another. This means speaking honestly, keeping promises, and avoiding the ills of gossiping and falling short of our commitments. To Partner with Purpose, we need to trust one another. To trust one another, we need to be trustworthy. And like Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz, we need to have faithful, loyal love for one another to establish and maintain that trust.

## **Conclusion**

Let's be a church that builds and maintains trust through our love for one another. Let's take the example of Naomi and Ruth to ask, search, and knock. God promises us that all those who ask will be given; all who search will find; all who knock will have the door opened for them. We trust God to hear us when we ask, search, and knock through prayer, and God calls us to ask, search, and knock with one another. But remember that that goes both ways, as we are also called to answer when another asks, searches, and knocks.