

Ruth 3            “An Excellent Wife: or, A Woman of Valor!”            December 13, 2015  
Psalm 111  
Luke 1:39-56

We saw last time that Boaz is called a “mighty man of valor” - a “gibbor khayil” (2:1).  
That is the same phrase used of Gideon in Judges 6,  
and of the mighty men of valor in the armies of Israel in the book of Joshua.

The ESV translates it “worthy man” in 2:1 -  
but that weakens the very comparison that the author is making.

Boaz *is* a mighty man of valor!  
We don't know about his “might” in war -  
but in terms of his godly character  
he is mighty in word and in deed!  
He is what a godly Israelite man should be.

But there was another reason why we highlighted that point last week.  
Because in our text today Ruth is called an “eshet khayil.”  
A woman of valor.

Khayil is a term *usually* applied to men.  
It usually refers to military strength and ability.

But an “eshet khayil” is a *woman of valor* – a woman of strength.  
And that phrase is only used in two other places in scripture:  
Proverbs 12:4 and Proverbs 31:10.

Yes, “eshet khayil” is the phrase translated “an excellent wife” in Proverbs 31!

Boaz, the “gibbor khayil” - the mighty man of valor -  
says to Ruth the Moabite -  
“all my fellow townsmen know that you are a *woman of valor*.”

Do you want to know what a Proverbs 31 woman looks like?  
Look at Ruth!  
She is a woman of valor!

I'm glad the ESV at least uses the same word in both places,  
but if all you say is that Boaz is a “worthy” man,  
and Ruth is a “worthy” woman,  
then you will miss the *strength* that is communicated in these words.

In the same way that Boaz is everything that an Israelite man should be,  
Ruth is everything that an Israelite woman should be!

And yes, that means that an escapee of Sodom – a Moabite –  
is the ideal Israelite woman!

God seems to enjoy turning our expectations on their heads!

Sing Psalm 111

Read Luke 1:39-56

What does it mean to be a “woman of valor”?

Any man who has seen his wife give birth to a child  
knows something of what this means!

Advent is a season of the year where we celebrate a pregnant woman.

I realize that we often jump forward to the *birth* of Jesus -  
but the *point* of Advent is to remember what it was like *before Jesus* –  
before the coming of the Word who became flesh!

That's why we read the gospel of Luke  
about the *pregnancy* of Elizabeth and Mary.

Here we have two pregnant women talking about their unborn children.

In one sense, this is very, very common scene!

But this conversation is unlike any other conversation between pregnant women!

Because Elizabeth is filled with the Holy Spirit -  
her son, John, leaps in her womb – when he hears the voice of Mary.

There is a reason *why* she is called the “Blessed Virgin” -  
because she is the “mother of my Lord.”

She is the fulfillment of the promise of the *Seed of the Woman*.

She is the virgin who conceived and bore a son.

Too often, in the modern world, we have devalued this amazing gift that God gave to women.

Only a woman can conceive and bear children.

Only she can provide – from her own body – the nourishment that a child needs.

Both of our stories – the story of Mary and the story of Ruth -  
center around the theme of childbearing.

And both of our stories focus on women who have had trouble with childbearing:

Naomi – whose sons have died;

Ruth – who was barren;

Elizabeth – who was barren;

and Mary – who was a virgin (and therefore entirely incapable of childbearing!)

There is *more* to being a woman of valor than childbearing!

And we'll see that in our text for today!

(Because Ruth was a woman of valor before she ever got pregnant!)

But childbearing is a *normal* part of what it means to be a woman of valor.

I say “normal” because it is built into God's creation blessing of humanity:  
“Be fruitful and multiply...”

I realize that because of sin, the abnormal has become all too common!  
There is what I like to call “common wrath.”  
Common grace is God's general favor towards humanity  
(the sun shines on the just and the unjust).  
Common wrath is likewise God's general disfavor towards humanity  
(the tornado hits the just and the unjust!).  
And common wrath is seen in our various “malfunctions.”  
We all malfunction in various ways.  
Some people get cancer – others get heart disease.  
And some women are barren.  
And some men are impotent.

It's not that *you sinned* and so God is judging you for *your sin*.  
Rather, you are part of the human race –  
and so you partake of the *misery* of humanity.

And quite frankly, our story today starts with Ruth in the *middle* of the misery.  
Her husband is dead.  
She is a foreigner – a Moabite in Bethlehem.

She has pledged herself to support her mother-in-law,  
knowing that this may mean gleaning in the fields for the rest of her life -  
*and* knowing that her decision to come to Bethlehem puts her mother-in-law  
in an awkward spot!

After all, if there is no Ruth, then any relative can redeem the land.  
Naomi will be taken care of – and then she dies: end of story.

If Ruth comes with Naomi, there is a glimmer of hope:  
someone from the family could marry Ruth,  
and thus provide redemption not just for the land, but also for Naomi!  
Because in ancient Jewish law,  
if a relative marries Ruth, their children are reckoned as Naomi's  
in order to continue the line and the inheritance of Elimelech.

But that glimmer of hope comes with a major down side:  
what good Jew will marry a Moabite?

That is the problem where we start in Ruth 3.

### **1. The Daring Plan at the Threshing Floor – Naomi Seeks Rest for Ruth (v1-5)**

*Then Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, “My daughter, should I not seek rest for you, that it may be well with you? 2 Is not Boaz our relative, with whose young women you were? See, he is*

winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. 3 Wash therefore and anoint yourself, and put on your cloak and go down to the threshing floor, but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. 4 But when he lies down, observe the place where he lies. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down, and he will tell you what to do.” 5 And she replied, “All that you say I will do.”

There are so many questions about this text!

Why is Naomi the one taking the initiative here?

What does Ruth think about this idea?

If Boaz wanted to marry Ruth, why didn't he say something?

If Ruth wanted Boaz to do something, why take such a risky route?

We would *love* to get back into people's heads and try to figure out the psychology.

But God did not give us answers to all of our questions.

Rather, he gives us *this text*.

Undoubtedly there were *many* more words spoken!

There were all sorts of other people who were part of the story.

If a video camera had shot the story,

we might be rather surprised at all of the other things that were said and done.

And if I try to guess, I may be able to entertain you with a good yarn,  
but what God is *saying* in this text is *even better!*

Watch Naomi!

Naomi had tried to persuade Ruth to go back to Moab.

She had blessed Orpah and Ruth, saying,

“The LORD grant that you may find rest,  
each of you in the house of her husband!”

“Rest” is the word that was used to speak of God's blessing in the Land -  
that the LORD would give Israel *rest* from all their enemies.

We've talked about how Ruth is a “little story” -  
a story about little people doing little things -  
they don't realize how their little story will connect to the “big story” of redemption.

But the language of this “little story” is the language of the big story!

God gives Israel *rest* from their enemies in the Promised Land.

And even so, Naomi wants Ruth to find *rest* in the house of her husband.

But Naomi understands what James will say centuries later:

“If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food,  
and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and filled,'  
without giving them the things needed for the body,  
what good is that?” (James 2:15-16)

She has blessed Ruth, “The LORD grant that you may find rest...”  
But what good is that?  
If she just sits there and waits for God to do something,  
when it is in her power to help,  
then she would be guilty of *cursing* Ruth.

Brothers and sisters,  
this should cause *all of us* to pause and think back over our words.  
How often have we said, “the LORD bless you” -  
and then, when it was within our power to bless,  
we did nothing.  
We need to see *our* little stories woven into the fabric of God's great tapestry.

We have seen examples of this in how Boaz, the mighty man of valor, blessed Ruth  
by giving her more than the law required.

And now we see Naomi doing the *one thing* that she can do for Ruth:  
giving advice for how to find a husband.

Though, I'll grant, it sure sounds like strange advice:  
Rather than a simple conversation,  
Naomi recommends the potentially scandalous route  
of a midnight encounter on the threshing floor.

There are sexual overtones in *everything* Naomi recommends.  
“Wash and anoint yourself” - so that you smell really good (in the dark).  
“do not make yourself known” -  
yes, in Hebrew the way you talk about sexual relations is  
“Adam *knew* his wife.”  
“uncover his feet” - in Hebrew the word “foot” is used as a euphemism  
for a different male body part...  
“and lie down” - to “lie” with someone  
is another way of talking about sexual intercourse.

Naomi is *not* saying “go have sex with him.”  
But she *is* saying “Go, make yourself really vulnerable and available -  
making it *abundantly clear* that you are putting yourself in his hands.”

This is an *incredibly* risky move.  
There are so many ways that this could end badly!

She could be mistaken for a prostitute – by Boaz (or someone else) –  
since prostitutes *often* gathered at threshing floors  
(there are echoes of the story of Tamar and Judah here!).  
Her actions could be misinterpreted –

since Boaz will wake up in the middle of the night  
with a sweet-smelling young woman at his feet!

But Naomi is counting on the fact that Boaz is a “mighty man of valor.”  
She is relying on his *honor* -  
and that he will see the humility and grace of Ruth -  
and will respond appropriately.

But notice that Naomi is doing all of this for *Ruth* -  
so that *Ruth* might find rest.

**2. “She Went Down to the Threshing Floor” - The Quest for a Redeemer (v6-13)**  
**a. “Spread Your Wings Over Your Servant” - Ruth's Request (v6-9)**

*6 So she went down to the threshing floor and did just as her mother-in-law had commanded her.*

First of all, why is Boaz at the threshing floor?  
Everyone lived in the village.  
But at threshing time, there is a lot of valuable grain  
just sitting there on the threshing floor outside of town.

And so those who were threshing would sleep there in order to protect the grain  
from thieves or from animals.

Earlier I referred to the story of Judah and Tamar.  
The book of Ruth itself calls attention to this connection in 4:12,  
when the women of Bethlehem speak of how Tamar bore Perez to Judah.

In Genesis 38, we hear the story of Judah and Tamar.  
Tamar was a Canaanite who had been married to Judah's oldest son.  
He died.  
And so Judah gave her to his second son,  
commanding him to raise up offspring for his brother.  
But he died.  
Judah then refused to give her his third son,  
and so Tamar dressed as a prostitute during the sheep-sheering,  
slept with Judah, and bore him twin sons.

Now another foreign woman is heading for the fields  
for an encounter with a descendant of Judah.

*7 And when Boaz had eaten and drunk, and his heart was merry, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she came softly and uncovered his feet and lay down. 8 At midnight the man was startled and turned over, and behold, a woman lay at his feet! 9 He said, “Who are you?”*

If you think about the story of the Moabites –  
how Lot's daughters seduced their father by getting him drunk –

you may start to wonder, “Is Ruth going to be like her great-grandmother?”

But Ruth is not your typical Moabite.

And further, Boaz is not like Lot.

His heart was merry – but he was not in a drunken stupor.

Lot was so drunk he didn't realize what his daughters were doing.

Boaz is a *gibbor chayil* – a mighty man of valor.

He understands that the purpose of wine is make the heart glad (Psalm 104)!

At midnight the man was startled.

Perhaps the breeze picked up, and his bare legs tingled!

But there, at his feet, lies a woman.

“Who are you? What are you doing here?”

*And she answered, “I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your wings[\[a\]](#) over your servant, for you are a redeemer.”*

There are three parts to Ruth's answer – all of which are important:

1) “I am Ruth, your servant.”

Back in chapter 2, verse 13, Ruth had referred to herself as “your servant, though I am not one of your servants.”

In that case, Ruth was using the term for a menial servant – little better than a slave.

But now she uses a different word,

a word that might be translated “maidservant” who is a member of the household.

By her choice of words, she is signaling that she is claiming a higher status than before!

2) Second, she says, “Spread your wings over your servant” -

The phrase *could* just mean “I'm cold – spread your garment over me” -  
but Boaz recognizes that she means far more!

Boaz had said back in 2:12, “The LORD repay you for what you have done,  
and a full reward be given you by the LORD, the God of Israel,  
under whose wings you have come to take refuge!”

Now Ruth challenges Boaz to put into practice what he has said.

“Do you really want the LORD God of Israel to reward me?

Yes, I have come to take refuge under his wings.

So *spread your wings over your servant.*”

Yes, it is true that Ruth could have said that to Boaz as he passed by the field where she gleaned.

But at midnight on the threshing floor -

where she has put herself and her reputation on the line -

she has thereby challenged him and *his honor*.  
Will he be a mighty man of valor?  
Will *he* step up and do that which he *said* he wanted Israel's God to do?

And so 3) she says: “For you are a redeemer.”  
And with those words Ruth makes her last pitch.  
Only a close relative can redeem the land.  
If Ruth goes out and marries someone else,  
then she will find rest,  
but Naomi will be left without a redeemer.

Do you realize what Ruth has just done?  
“Here is a servant demanding that the boss marry her,  
a Moabite making the demand of an Israelite,  
a woman making the demand of a man,  
a poor person making the demand of a rich man.” (Block, 692)

And when Boaz hears those words in the darkness of the night,  
he marvels at the young woman lying at his feet.

Because only now do we discover what Naomi and Ruth have known all along:  
Boaz is an older man.

**b. “You Are a Woman of Valor” - Boaz's Reply (v10-13)**

*10 And he said, “May you be blessed by the LORD, my daughter. You have made this last kindness greater than the first in that you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich.*

The fact that he calls her “my daughter” -  
and speaks of how she could have gone after young men -  
demonstrates that he is considerably older than she is.

He may well have been smitten with her when he saw her working in the field.  
We don't know their ages – but for practical purposes,  
in our culture, it would be like a 50 year old widower  
and a 25 year old widow.  
Yeah, she's a remarkable woman – too bad I'm not 20 years younger...

Notice his response:  
“You have made this last kindness greater than the first...”  
Now the word “kindness” is the word *hesed* -  
which means steadfast love, covenant loyalty.  
He's not referring to her kindness to him -  
“aw, you're so sweet to marry an old geezer like me!”  
No!  
That's *not it* – at all!!



Rather, he is referring to her *kindness* – to her *steadfast love* and *covenant faithfulness* - to *Naomi*.

After all, notice the evidence for her *hesed*:

“you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich.”

If Ruth had gone after a young man  
Boaz is pretty sure she could have found one!

But she has shown *hesed* to Naomi.  
Ruth has been faithful to her promise: “where you go, I will go...”  
And when Naomi said, “go, propose to Boaz” -  
Ruth did it.

Greater faith I have not seen in Israel!

*11 And now, my daughter, do not fear. I will do for you all that you ask, for all my fellow townsmen know that you are a worthy woman.*

Whatever rumors and gossip may have gone around town at first,  
Ruth's character has become clear throughout all of Bethlehem.

She is a “woman of valor.”  
“Worthy” just doesn't quite capture the meaning of *chayil!*  
Her strength – her valor – and for that matter her *hesed* – her covenant loyalty -  
has become known throughout all the town.

She is the “excellent wife” - the “woman of valor” - the ideal daughter of Abraham.

At the same time, she is asking *a lot*.  
She is asking that Boaz redeem the land.  
This means that Boaz must pay off the mortgage that Elimelech had put on the property.  
This means that Boaz must work the land and improve the land.  
And it means that any child that Boaz and Ruth might have  
will be considered the heir of Elimelech.

So all of Boaz's investment will simply impoverish his own heirs.

Do you understand now why Ruth comes at night?  
Why Ruth comes in a way that puts herself *most* at risk?

Ruth has *nothing* in all the world except *herself*.  
And she is going to ask a *mighty man of valor*  
to put his wealth and reputation on the line *for her*  
and for Naomi.

Boaz understands what she has done.

It is entirely possible that if Ruth asks this in the daytime in passing conversation –  
if Ruth had risked nothing to find out his interest –  
he might have said no.

But she has put herself entirely in his hands.  
She has risked *everything she has* for Naomi.

And so he pledges to do all that she has asked.

But there is a problem.  
Boaz is *second in line* to redeem.

Here is the other reason why Boaz would not have approached Ruth.  
Boaz might have *wanted* to marry Ruth,  
but there was someone else who was first in line to be the redeemer.  
Would he step forward and redeem Ruth?

*12 And now it is true that I am a redeemer. Yet there is a redeemer nearer than I.*

In Leviticus 25, we hear about the purpose of the “redeemer.”  
“The land shall not be sold permanently, for the land is Mine,  
for you are strangers and sojourners with Me.  
And in all the land of your possession you shall grant redemption of the land.  
If one of your brothers becomes poor, and has sold some of his possession,  
and if his redeeming relative comes to redeem it,  
then he may redeem what his brother sold.” (Lev 25:23-25)

Leviticus 25:47-49 goes on to say that the kinsman-redeemer  
may also redeem his family members from slavery.

The point of the kinsman-redeemer is to ensure that the Land and the Seed remain connected.  
When a member of the family hits hard times,  
the family (the clan – the kinship network) is to make sure  
that they do all that they can to keep Land and Seed together.  
Incidentally, this approach will also go a long way  
to prevent the consolidation of wealth in the hands of the few.

Land is the foundation of wealth in the ancient world.  
But in Israel, it was hard to accumulate land!  
Because you could not alienate land permanently.

Elimelech had sold his land and left Bethlehem.  
But whoever had bought the land  
knew that *at any time* a redeemer could arise and redeem the land.

And when the Redeemer came, he would restore the family to its land.

So Boaz tells Ruth:

*13 Remain tonight, and in the morning, if he will redeem you, good; let him do it. But if he is not willing to redeem you, then, as the LORD lives, I will redeem you. Lie down until the morning.*”

We'll see next time that Boaz is not *nearly* so neutral in the matter as he sounds here!

And even here, Boaz swears an oath, “as the LORD lives”  
that he will redeem Ruth.

### **3. The Scandal and the Promise at the Threshing Floor (v14-18)**

*14 So she lay at his feet until the morning, but arose before one could recognize another. And he said, “Let it not be known that the woman came to the threshing floor.”*

Ruth has risked her reputation and her honor to come to the threshing floor,  
so Boaz commands his young men to keep their mouths shut!

But he also sends her home with a pledge that he will perform what he said he would do:

*15 And he said, “Bring the garment you are wearing and hold it out.” So she held it, and he measured out six measures of barley and put it on her. Then she went into the city. 16 And when she came to her mother-in-law, she said, “How did you fare, my daughter?”*

In Hebrew the question reads, “Who are you, my daughter?”

If Boaz and Ruth had a busy night,

I do not doubt that Naomi's was busier!

Did she even sleep in her dark room as the hours passed?

Would this daring, dangerous gambit work?

Would Boaz be a “mighty man of valor?”

Or like so many in the days of the judges,

would he succumb to doing what was right in his own eyes...?

“Will he love us enough to redeem us?” (Deliyannides, chapter 9, page 8)

And so now, in the morning, she sees Ruth approaching,

“Who are you, my daughter?”

Has my plan for finding rest for you worked?

Or has it ruined you?

*Then she told her all that the man had done for her, 17 saying, “These six measures of barley he gave to me, for he said to me, ‘You must not go back empty-handed to your mother-in-law.’”*

We are not told *what* measure was used -

it may just be six handfuls of barley -  
but he gives her a pledge that he will do what he has promised.  
But there is a very simple reason why he gives her *six*.

Six days shall you labor and do all your work,  
but on the seventh you shall rest.  
Boaz will give her “six of barley” as the pledge that her Sabbath day is coming!-  
the day when she will enter her rest.

But Boaz's words are also a play on Naomi's words at the end of chapter 1.  
The word “empty-handed” is simply the word empty -  
the same word Naomi used in 1:21:  
“I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty.” (1:21)

Boaz had blessed Ruth by saying, “May the LORD take you under his wings.”  
Ruth had challenged him to fulfill that blessing himself.  
And so Boaz has answered by saying  
“you must not go back empty to your mother-in-law.”

And *yes* we are still playing with imagery here!  
He has not filled her womb (yet!) - but he has filled her garment  
with the fruit of the Land -  
as a pledge of his intentions to fill her womb as soon as it is proper.

*18 She replied, “Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out, for the man will not rest but will settle the matter today.”*

Naomi understands *exactly* what Boaz is saying!  
And so she tells Ruth to sit tight and wait.  
“The man will not rest but will settle the matter today!”

We, however, will have to wait another week!

But during this week I want you to think about what Ruth teaches us.  
Ruth shows us what it means to be “a woman of valor” -  
the “excellent wife” of Proverbs 31.

Perhaps you've wondered as a single woman,  
“how does Proverbs 31 apply to me?”  
Well, “*eshet chayil*” does not mean “excellent wife.”  
It *means* “woman of valor.”

Sure, the particular woman described in Proverbs 31 is married -  
but that is not necessary for a woman to be a Proverbs 31 woman!

Proverbs 31 uses the example of a wealthy Israelite wife -  
a married Israelite woman  
who has many servants,  
a large household,  
and great wealth at her disposal!

But Ruth 3 shows us that you don't need to be any of the above!  
She is not an Israelite.  
She is not married.  
She *is* a servant – or less.  
She has no household.  
She has no money – no wealth.

And yet Ruth is a “woman of valor.”  
She is *everything* that a faithful Israelite woman should be!

How can you be a “woman of valor”?  
How can you be a Proverbs 31 woman?

Deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Jesus.  
Be faithful to your God – and to one another.  
Don't be passive.  
In your love for God and others, be willing to take a risk.  
Be willing to do the *uncomfortable* thing  
even the *dangerous or unpopular* thing  
in order to honor Jesus and his people!