

Waiting With Promise

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

By the time we get to Ruth chapter 3, Ruth and Naomi are no longer starving. They have food for the day. They have survived, but survival isn't the same as peace. Naomi and Ruth are still widows. They're still vulnerable. Ruth is still a foreigner in Bethlehem. They have enough barley to eat, but they do not yet have a secure future. That's where we pick up the story today, not in a place of complete despair, but not in a place of settled hope either.

That may be a place many of us recognize. There are seasons in life when we're technically "getting by," but still not okay. The bills may be paid this month, but the future is uncertain. The funeral may be over, but the grief lingers on. The treatment may have begun, but healing is not yet in sight. The apology may have been spoken, but the relationship is still hurting and tender. The next step may be visible, but the destination is not. Naomi understands their precarious situation, yet for the first time in a while, Naomi begins to move with hope. She says to Ruth, "My daughter, I need to seek some security for you, so that it may be well with you." That word "security" can also mean rest, peace, settled-ness. Naomi is not simply playing matchmaker. She isn't just trying to get Ruth married off. Naomi is longing for Ruth to have a life beyond mere survival.

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This is the first real visible movement of grace in this story. Hope begins to come back to life again. God's amazing grace doesn't always arrive as a lightning bolt from heaven. Sometimes grace first appears as just enough hope to take the next step forward when that's all you can muster. Naomi has lost so much. Earlier in the story, she said, "Call me Mara," which means bitter, but here, bitterness does not get the last word. Grief has not disappeared, but hope has begun to stir. So, Naomi makes a plan.

Now, we should admit, it is a strange plan to our ears. Ruth is to wash, anoint herself, put on her best clothes, go down to the threshing floor, wait until Boaz has eaten and drunk, and then uncover his feet and lie down. This is one of those Bible stories where, I usually tell the confirmation class, "Okay, everybody stay with me here." There is mystery and risk in this scene. The Bible does not explain every detail, but it's crystal clear about how vulnerable Ruth is. She's taking a risk. Acting in faith, loyalty, and courage.

That's the very definition of faith. In faith we're able to take risks because we trust the one in whom our faith is grounded. So, Ruth goes to the threshing floor at night. She goes quietly. She waits. Then she does what Naomi told her to do. At midnight, Boaz wakes up startled. He realizes someone is there. He asks, "Who are you?" And Ruth answers, "I am Ruth, your servant. Spread your cloak over your servant, for you are next-of-kin." This phrase in our English translation

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may sound a little strange, but it's Ruth's plea to Boaz to protect her. She's asking him to act as redeemer. She is asking him to use his position, his household, his name, and his resources to help provide a future for her and Naomi. Ruth was able to step out in faith, trusting in the prayer and blessing Boaz had already spoken to her when he said, "May you have a full reward from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge." Boaz prayed Ruth would find shelter under the wings of God. Now she comes to him and says, in effect, "You prayed that God would shelter me. Will you be part of God's sheltering mercy?"

That is a powerful question because sometimes we pray for God to do something, and then God places part of the answer in our hands. We pray, "Lord, feed the hungry," and God may put food in our pantry to share. We pray, "Lord, comfort the grieving," and God may put a phone in our hand and a name on our heart. We pray, "Lord, protect the vulnerable," and God may ask us to become part of that protection. Ruth asks Boaz to become the answer to the blessing he has already spoken and Boaz does not shame her.

We've heard it said that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts, absolutely. Not here... Boaz uses his power and influence for mercy. He has all the power in this situation, not Ruth. Boaz could misunderstand her. He could embarrass her. He could take advantage of her vulnerability. He could protect himself and send her away with nothing. But he does none of that, instead, Boaz

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blesses Ruth. He says, “May you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter.” He recognizes her loyalty. He calls her a worthy woman. He promises to act. He also tells the truth: there is another relative closer than he is. Boaz cannot simply force the outcome. He has to do this rightly. That matters because it shows Boaz to be a righteous and honorable man. His kindness isn’t careless. His mercy has integrity. He wants redemption, but not at the expense of righteousness. He protects Ruth’s dignity. He protects her reputation and before she leaves, he gives her six measures of barley to carry home to Naomi.

In a world where power is often used to take, Boaz shows us power used to protect. That is no small thing in the world we live in today. I suspect most of us don’t think of ourselves as powerful. We may say, “I’m just one person. What power do I have?” My dear friends, every one of us has some kind of power. We have words. We have time. We have experience. We have resources. We have influence in a family, a workplace, a congregation, a community. We have the power to include or exclude, to listen or ignore, to bless or belittle, to protect someone’s dignity or expose their weakness. Boaz shows us what faithful power looks like. It looks like mercy. It looks like restraint. It looks like keeping another person safe. It looks like saying, “You will not leave empty.”

This is where the story begins to point us beyond Boaz. Boaz is a redeemer in this story, but he is not the final Redeemer. Boaz gives us a glimpse of the

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mercy that's fulfilled in Christ. Jesus is the Redeemer who does not shame the vulnerable. Jesus is the Redeemer who does not send those in want away empty. Jesus is the Redeemer who receives those who come in the darkness, those who come afraid, those who come uncertain, those who come with nothing but need. At the cross, Jesus uses his power not to save himself, but to save us. He spreads over us, not a cloak, but God's mercy and love. He gathers us into the Kingdom of God, not because we have earned it, but because God is faithful.

Still, chapter 3 of Ruth doesn't end with everything resolved. We wait with promise. Ruth returns to Naomi before sunrise. Naomi asks, "How did things go with you, my daughter?" Ruth tells her everything. Then she shows Naomi the barley Boaz gave her and Naomi says, "Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out." That may be one of the most honest lines in the whole chapter.

Wait... ... Most of us know something about waiting. Waiting for test results. Waiting for a phone call. Waiting for the grief to soften. Waiting for the family tension to ease. Waiting for the surgery date. Waiting for the right door to open. Waiting for God to show us what comes next. Boaz didn't send Ruth away empty-handed and Jesus doesn't send us away empty either. We don't get the whole future. It is not yet the marriage. It is not yet the child. It is not yet the full redemption of Naomi's family line, but it is a promise. It's a sign that Boaz is already at work. Isn't that is where we live as Christians? We live between

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promise and fulfillment. Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again. The resurrection has already happened, but the fullness of God's kingdom has not yet come. We still wait. We still grieve. We still pray. We still wonder how the matter will turn out. But we do not wait empty-handed. We have the promises of God. We have the body and blood of Christ. We have baptismal waters poured over us. We have the Word spoken into our fear. We have the Spirit interceding for us with sighs too deep for words. We have signs of grace placed in our arms like barley before dawn.

So, friends, I do not know what you are waiting for today. I do not know what unresolved story you carried into worship this morning. I do not know where you are asking, "Lord, how will this turn out?" But I do know this: you are not abandoned or alone in the waiting. You have all of us, but more importantly, your Redeemer is already at work. The One who spreads mercy over you is faithful. The One who shelters you under his wings will not let shame, fear, sin, or death have the last word. So, wait, dear children of God — but do not wait empty-handed. Wait with promise. Wait with mercy. Wait with hope. Wait beneath the wings of Christ, our Redeemer. May the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be with you now and always. Amen.