

“Trite, Trifling and Trivial”
 Sermon for 5 March 2017
 Text: Ruth 3:14-4:3

Not once, but twice, the question is asked, “**Who are you?**” in Chapter 3. The first, by Boaz, stunned to find Ruth lying at his feet. Startled even, for it was midnight! One commentator said, knowing these fears were current, Boaz was afraid for demons were known to haunt likely places like threshing floors. But she, who had been waiting on pins and needles for this moment of discovery was no demon. **I am Ruth, your handmaiden. Spread your wings over your servant, for you are ‘a redeemer.’**(v. 9) Her word choice is telling, the word she uses carries the insinuation of marriageability—surely, this was no accident! She had taken the risk of coming to him at night and proposing marriage to him subtly but pointedly. She also told him what she was there for: *cover me as you would cover your own wife*. Impressed by the stunning beauty of her forwardness, I wonder if she lay there in some trepidation. It was possible that he would refuse her, or that she had misread his kindness and favor. Therefore, vulnerability is there, tentativeness.

Additionally, we know that she had a “history of barrenness,” testified to by her ten year, childless marriage to Mahlon, her former husband. She couldn’t know if it was him, or her, or both of them that caused this infertility. *She had no guarantees that she could even get pregnant!* She did know that God could give her conception (4:13) and she would know the prayers of the congregation: **We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman, who is coming to your house like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel.** (v.11) **And may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring that the Lord will give you by this young woman.** (v.12) This reference takes us back to Genesis 38.

So, the witnesses are witnesses to the story of Rachel and Leah. They recall that Rachel, the passionate love of Jacob’s life, was barren. Leah had children and she did not. The soul-wrenching rivalry between the two women is not played down at all! It is as if they think that love and value are summed up through childbearing! And that error torments them all, Jacob included. And they are witnesses to the fact that twelve sons come from that marriage and family! They **built up the house of Israel!** This family is also the family that sojourned in Egypt during the great famine—and Joseph has been sent ahead as a royal, kinsman-redeemer—and a type of Christ.

They also bring up **the house of Perez** which we shared about from Genesis 38:27-30, English Standard Version (ESV):

27 When the time of her (Tamar’s) labor came, there were twins in her womb. 28 And when she was in labor, one put out a hand, and the midwife took and tied a scarlet thread on his hand, saying, “This one came out first.” 29 But as he drew back his hand, behold, his brother came out. And she said, “What a breach you have made for yourself!” Therefore his name was called Perez.[a] 30 Afterward his brother came out with the scarlet thread on his hand, and his name was called Zerah.

Footnotes: [a] Genesis 38:29 Perez means a breach

Let's consider this piece more deeply. Tamar conceived of her twin sons by union with her father-in-law, Judah, after the wickedness of his firstborn and second born sons left Tamar a childless widow. **He** (Judah) **feared that he** (Selah, his third son) **would die, like his brothers**. (38.11) This "unfairness" to Tamar was addressed through Tamar's initiative, a kindred spirit to Ruth?! This being so in spite of a breach of propriety. Now the people who blessed Ruth and Boaz were completely familiar with patriarchal history! And Perez, through a curious reversal of birth order, came forth as the firstborn and through Perez the line of David would be secured! This fact falls out of the text in Ruth before we get to the genealogy of King David (4:18). And, consequently, is no trifling detail! Of course, Ruth knows none of this firsthand, beforehand! She may have heard of it in Sabbath services but not known its applicability to her own life!

Returning to our current text, we have Ruth on the threshing floor, full of hope and longing and anxiety—she is washed, anointed and dressed as if for marriage. Thus Boaz discovers her. Now we note there is nothing trite in what they say to each other. Admittedly the dialogue between the two has been very sparse—months appear to have passed with no proposal, no movement towards marriage on Boaz's part. And the harvesting season has come to its natural end. She says, **You are a redeemer . . .so redeem me!** He seems flabbergasted, even as much as pleased: **May you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter. You have made this last kindness** (to me, I am much your senior and not the prime pick of the herd.) We see that he is quite *oblivious* to the possibility that God has preserved him for this time, this role, this redemption) **greater than the first** (by which he alludes to her adoption of Naomi as her life project). This lovely girl is all about putting the needs of others before her own; she truly has a servant's heart. And it is not only beautiful, but it is admirable. Her character is outstanding: **for all my townsmen know that you are a worthy woman**. Lovely, feminine, yes, but all that is trivial compared to her native diligence. She is hardworking, persevering, persistently providing . . . resourceful, competent and capable . . . virtuous and righteous. Everyone knows it, and most people see it! She is very bit the Proverbs 31 woman—minus the godly man. Now where would we find one of them,?

Boaz says, **I will do all that you ask**. (v.11) I will redeem you, protect you, even marry you; BUT there exists one, or two major problems. First, there is a redeemer closer than I—the law favors him, not me and us. Second, we will have to litigate this. **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.** And that's that: **Lie down until morning**. Don't even think of returning home at this hour of the night. It is not safe.

So she lay at his feet until morning, but arose before one could recognize the other. (14) They did not embrace. She did not fall into his arms, and he did not take her into his. There was absolutely nothing untoward, impure or unseemly between them. But if she didn't leave without notice, Boaz feared that their righteous behavior would be sullied by the mere presence of a woman **on the threshing floor**. (v.14) Boaz will not have anything tarnish her reputation. He instructs her to spread out her mantle and he places in it twice the amount of grain that Ruth had gleaned on her first day. Perhaps as much as fifty pounds. **You must not go back empty-handed to your mother-in-law**. (v.17) However, it is when Ruth returns home that she is asked, **Who are you?** for the second time—the exact same phrase that Boaz used! (Verse 16 as

compared to verse 9.) The particle in v.16, however can be rendered “what” or “How” in stead of “who” so the sense would be; what has befallen you, what success have you had? how have things gone for you? are you married? or have you secured a promise of marriage? could it happen? Which makes the second expression a pun on the first!

Therefore it makes perfect sense for Naomi to say, **Sit still, my daughter, until you know how the matter will fall: for the man will not rest until he has finished the thing this day.** (v.18) Naomi, in essence, declares victory. She has complete confidence in Boaz. He will follow through . . . today! Nothing trite, nothing trifling and nothing trivial! Indeed this is great word for us as we move towards Easter. . . and beyond. Yes, for as astounding as Easter is for us , as wonderful as the defeat of Satan, sin, death and the grave, and as freeing as forgiveness is and as empowering as the Holy Spirit is, we are looking for a greater day! We are looking for the return of our risen Lord, and for the coming of His kingdom in fullness and power, we are looking for the day of our glorious reunion with Him! It will happen. He is attending to business even as we speak! Whether we go to him, or he comes to us . . . it will happen.

Lord, bring it on.

Amen.