

FIVE FORKS BRETHREN IN CHRIST CHURCH
9244 Five Forks Road
Waynesboro, PA 17268-9612 Tel: (717) 762-2991

SCRIPTURE: *Ruth 2:18-23*

DATE: *March 14th, 2021*

LOCATION: *Auditorium (Bill)*

SERMON: *“Naomi’s Revival”*

(Acknowledgement to Carolyn Custis James for her book, The Gospel of Ruth; and Philip DeCourcy for his podcast on the life of Ruth)

Our sermon series is called **“A Page Turner”** ...a phrase we use to describe a book that is so interesting, we just can’t put down...we just keep on turning the pages. I’ve been suggesting that your life can be a page turner – that is, very interesting – if you are willing to join in on the work God is doing.

God is inviting you and I to become a part of something much bigger than ourselves, and this is what we see taking place in the book of **Ruth**.

Go ahead and open up your Bible, get out your device, or follow along on the screen as we head back to the second chapter of Ruth, picking up where we left off last week, starting with verse 18.

This morning’s message is titled, **Naomi’s Revival**, and we’re going to begin as we have been doing, by watching a short video sketch that will remind us of what we’ve looked so far, as well as give us an overview of **What’s Happening** in today’s Scripture text. Then we’ll look at **What We Don’t Want to Miss.** Where is God saying, “Slow down and think about this.” And finally, I’ll be asking you, **What’s Your Next Step?** What step is God asking you to take in order to participate in the work He is doing?

First, let’s see...

1. WHAT’S HAPPENING

...so far in the book of Ruth.

VIDEO

I've been talking about books that are page turners...and it's not uncommon for some really, really good books to be turned into movies. Have you ever gone to see a movie because you really liked the book?

I usually come away from these a bit underwhelmed, and I guess that shouldn't be any surprise. It takes hours and sometimes days to read a good book. It usually takes less than two hours to watch a movie, which means that there's a lot of stuff – good stuff – that has to be left out.

I like these sketches that are put out by this group called **The Bible Project**, but because their intent is to just give an overview, these just scratch the surface when it comes to what actually was taking place in Bethlehem a few thousand years ago.

When we left off last week, Ruth was having a pretty good day, was she not? Boaz was looking out for her, he had invited her to eat with him and his workers...he had prayed a blessing over her, and made sure she went home with an abundance of food.

While all of this was going on, what do you think was happening with Naomi? Ah, yes, Naomi...she doesn't have any idea what has been unfolding out there in the field.

Before we get into today's scripture passage, let's take a minute and think about...

A. Naomi's Dark Place

How easy is it for you to feel other people's pain? While I often wish that compassion would come easier for me, I do want to be able to empathize with people and try to understand what they are going through.

As so as I've been reading about Naomi and all that she's endured, I'm trying as best I can to understand how she must be feeling, what emotions must be working inside of her.

I'm not sure if you've seen the movie "Saving Private Ryan." There is a gut wrenching scene that takes place early in the movie...a woman is working in her kitchen, and out her window is a long lane. The movie is set during World War II, and she has 4 sons that are serving overseas, and unbeknownst to her, three of them have recently been killed in action. As this mother looks out the window, she sees a military car pull into the lane and approach the house...we know why they've come...they are coming to tell this mother that 3 of her sons are dead.

You can see she's hesitant, moving nervously towards the door and eventually out onto the porch, as the vehicle pulls up and a military man and a chaplain get out of the car. No words are spoken, you just watch the scene unfold. Unable to stand, she sinks to her knees, overwhelmed by the weight of what she is about to be told.

There is pain and tragedy and death throughout the entire film, but this scene is impossible for me to watch without feeling in some small way, the pain that every parent must endure with the loss of a child. It gives me some idea of the pain that Naomi has experienced in her own life.

And for Naomi, as bad as things had been in Moab, what with the death of her husband and the death of her sons, don't you think that coming back to Bethlehem would have only have opened up old wounds?

Naomi and Elimelech most likely met and were married in Bethlehem. It's likely that this is where she gave birth to two sons...and watched them wrestle and play and do what brothers do. Coming back to Bethlehem would have stirred up countless memories for Naomi.

It's kind of like when someone's spouse dies, and suddenly the closet containing the clothing of the one who has passed away becomes something incredibly significant. Just the sight of it, the clothes that were worn, the favorites and the not-so-favorites stir up emotions and are reminders of what life used to be like.

Bethlehem would have stirred up memories of what life used to be like with a husband at her side and two boys romping around together.

There was surely a dark cloud hanging over her, as she herself described herself and afflicted, empty and bitter. The worst thing in all of this was, she not only had lost the love of her husband and her sons, but somewhere back in Moab, God had stopped loving her as well. At least, this is what she believed.

Because **how can God's love be real in the face of so much pain**, so much loss? Naomi's answer is that God's love can't be real, at least not for her.

In her book *The Gospel of Ruth*, Carolyn James writes,

“Because she cannot rid herself of the pain, she throws out God's love. Naomi pitches a tent in this dark place. That's where she is camping the morning Ruth sets out to glean. So when Ruth steps inside the door that evening, Naomi is completely unprepared for what happens next.”

Let's go today's passage and take a close look at what it is that happens next. Let's talk about...

2. WHAT WE DON'T WANT TO MISS

First of all, don't you think that Ruth had to have been exhausted as she makes her way back home? She's had a full, hard day of work...not to mention lugging more than 30 pounds of grain. At the same time, do you know what it's like to be able to give someone something special, and that excitement you feel on the inside as you anticipate the person's response? Ruth, maybe with a bounce in her step, was probably thinking, *“I can't wait to see Naomi's face!”*

And so one thing that we don't want to miss is...

A. Naomi's Initial Reaction

It's found in verse 18...

Ruth 2:18a She carried it back to town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gathered.

Well that's pretty underwhelming, isn't it? It's very matter of fact. I'm looking for, "her mouth flew open"... "her eyes widened".... "she clutched her chest". Instead, it's very low-key...we're simply told she "saw" how much Ruth had gathered.

But I get it....because whenever you see something that totally blows your mind, it takes a few moments as to try to process it. When Naomi sees all the grain Ruth is bringing through the door...well, she's got some processing to do.

Because she was hoping that somehow, someday, Ruth would come home with enough grain to get them through one more day. You see, when a gleaner would go out into the field, they were hoping to find enough to feed themselves and their family for just one more day...one, maybe two pounds. For Naomi, that would be the best case scenario...enough for one more day.

Naomi would have had a hard time processing what she saw when Ruth walked through the door with more than 30 pounds of grain.

Just as she's trying to wrap her mind around this, Ruth reaches inside her garment and pulls out some roasted grain. *[Ruth 2:18b](#) Ruth also brought out and gave to her what she had left over after she had eaten enough.*

Remember last week we saw how Boaz had invited Ruth to eat with him, and he gave her so much roasted grain she couldn't eat it all. She tucked it away with the intention of taking it home to her mother-in-law.

We have no idea how long it has been since Naomi last ate. And so she's probably very hungry, and yes, suddenly there is a lot of grain, but it needs to be ground up, prepared and baked. This will take a few hours.

But because of Ruth's incredible thoughtfulness, Naomi no longer needs to wait, a meal has already been prepared...it's been described as the first fast-food meal in the Bible.

And so Naomi's initial reaction is trying to process all of this...Who? "Where?" "How?"

And Ruth's answer is direct and to the point...

Ruth 2:19b “The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz.”

And suddenly the processing is over, for this news triggers a dramatic response from Naomi.

And this is the next thing we don't want to miss...

B. Naomi's Revival

...and what brings it about. This transformation occurs quickly.

Ruth 2:20 “The Lord bless him!” Naomi said to her daughter-in-law “He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead.”

For the past few hours...the past few years in fact, Naomi has been lamenting her tragic fate. And just like that, she calls on the Lord – the very same Lord who she said made her afflicted, empty and bitter – she calls on the Lord to bless this man. In the blink of an eye, bitter “Mara” is gone...and Naomi has been revived.

That's a pretty quick and dramatic turn-around, wouldn't you say? And so, what exactly is going on here? **What is it that brings about this dramatic transformation within Naomi?**

I believe the answer may be found in one word that's right here in the midst of our passage...the word is **“Kindness”**... *“He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead.”* ...in the original language the Hebrew word is...

C. Hesed

Now, some of you might be saying, *“You know, I've heard that word somewhere before.”* And if you're one of them, plus one for you. Extra credit – plus two - if you can remember where you heard it and what it means.

Last July Pastor Shaun did a sermon series called **“What's In a Name?”** ...and we spent several weeks looking at various names of God - *“The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate*

and gracious God” - and one week Shaun talked about how God is “**Hesed-Emet**”, describing God’s love (Hesed) and faithfulness (emet).

Hesed is a rich word, it is a powerful word...so powerful that Hebrew Scholars say that it is very hard to translate, because there is no word in the English language that can capture its exact meaning. When talking about God, some will describe **hesed** as the totality of God’s goodness...His love, mercy, kindness.

When talking about us, Custis James says that Hebrew scholars will tell us that...

“Hesed is a strong Hebrew word that sums up the ideal lifestyle for God’s people. It’s the way God intended for human beings to live together from the beginning – the ‘love-your-neighbor-as-yourself’ brand of living, an active, selfless, sacrificial caring for one another that goes against the grain of our fallen natures...it’s the kind of love we see most fully expressed in Jesus.”

“The way that God has always intended for us to live”...loving one another in such a way that often goes against the grain of our natural tendency to put ourselves first.

It is “**hesed**” that is behind this dramatic revival that we see taking place within Naomi.

Ruth 2:20 “The Lord bless him!” Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, “He has not stopped showing his kindness (hesed) to the living and the dead.”

Now, let me ask you...who is “He?” Is Naomi talking about the kindness of God or is she talking about the kindness of Boaz? I’ve gone to Bible commentaries that say God and other commentaries that say Boaz...but you know what? In the end, Boaz is actively participating in the work that God is doing, and by doing so, both of them are displaying the power of **hesed**.

And a dramatic transformation that takes place in the life of Naomi.

In the weeks to come we will continue to see **hesed** on display. This 30 pound sack of grain...this roasted grain ready to eat grain...coming from not just any landowner, but one who is called a kinsman-redeemer. Which is huge, as we will see next week.

All of this shows Naomi that God has not forgotten her. She will go to bed on this night with a full stomach and enough grain to last for weeks. Not just that, Boaz has guaranteed to ensure Ruth's safety as she continues to glean in the field. A day that began with so much despair and uncertainty has ended with so much goodness.

And yet it does not mean that all of the pain of the past will simply go away. The pillow next to Naomi is still empty. Her sons will not be coming back. And so going forward, **both love and pain will be present in her life. One will not eliminate the other.**

The presence of pain in our lives does not mean that God does not love us. Nor does God's love guarantee that we will never experience pain. We see this clearly in the life of Naomi.

This is one thing that God wants each of you – in here, out there - to be certain of....No matter what your circumstances, His love for you is real, and it is not going away.

So, in this passage that we've looked at today, it takes place in a very short window of time. Ruth walks in, with all of this grain, coming from the field of Boaz...and Naomi realizes that she was wrong about God...His care, His love, His *hesed*...has not been taken from her. And this awareness revives her.

What have you seen in this short passage that helps you to recognize...

3. YOUR NEXT STEP?

Every week we close by talking about the importance of doing something in response to whatever it is that God teaches us. We know that we're not to be indifferent to what we look at, the things He shows us. And so – as you know – I always try to make a few suggestions.

I will often start with this one, because it really is the starting point for all of us...a decision to **Begin Following Jesus**. We don't know much about Jesus childhood or early adult years. What we do know that once His ministry among us began, He would use this invitation..."Come, follow me."

“Spend time with me...listen as I teach...watch carefully how I live...see what is important and what is not. And the thing that is most important is that you love God and that you love others. By this all people will know that you follow me.”

Jesus extends this invitation to all of us, and there may be some in here and out there who have never responded to this invitation. Maybe because you haven't realized that **Jesus is the primary way that God shows His *hesed* for you.**

And the next step for some of you is to allow God to revive you, transform you, and it all begins when you respond to Jesus' invitation to follow Him. If you do this let me know. We'll set up a time to meet here at the church and share some coffee or whatever, and talk about the steps that follow this first step.

For those of you who have already grasped this powerful display of God's ***hesed*** and are now following Jesus, Perhaps your next step is simply to **Begin Recognizing God in the Little Things.**

Yes, there's no doubt that when Naomi saw the 30+ pounds of grain, it would have made her heart leap. But I think there was something else that meant just as much to Naomi, if not more.

It was when Ruth slipped her hand inside her garment, and pulled out the half-eaten piece of roasted grain. As I mentioned earlier, we have no idea how much time has passed since Naomi last ate. Sometimes, many times, God's ***hesed*** for us is found in the little things, like a small half-eaten piece of bread.

And sometimes, many times, we fail to see it. Can I ask you this?: *“When was the last time you remember God sending you a message...and by that I mean reaching out to you in a special way...reminding you that He sees you...is with you...and cares about you.”*

When was the last time you recall God reaching out to you?

Let's be honest, when someone extends to us an act of kindness, when you or I are on the receiving end of *hesed*...how often do we even consider that God's hand is in

this...perhaps as a way of reminding us that He sees us...and He cares? I wonder how many times God has tried sending us a message, and we missed it?

In her book Custis James shares about a tragedy that occurred in her family a few years ago. In the midst of a search and rescue event that became a national event, her husband, Frank was being interviewed, and he found himself out in the bitter cold mountain air, without a pair of gloves, and his hands were freezing. A producer from CNN noticed and offered his gloves to Frank. After the interview was over, the producer refused to take the gloves back.

Lives were lost in this tragic event, and a pair of gloves seems pretty insignificant. But Frank would often refer to that simple act of kindness – *hesed* – as a moment that touched him deeply. And was perhaps God’s way of telling Frank – in the midst of tragedy - that he was not forgotten.

The next time that someone extends to you and act of kindness that touches your heart, don’t rule out the possibility that God is orchestrating this. The next step that some of us need to take is recognizing God reminding us of His love, His kindness, His ***hesed*** – and it’s often found in the little things.

One final suggestion as far as your next step...it’s great when we are on the receiving end of God’s *hesed*. But we need to **Be looking for ways to show *hesed* to others.**

“...an active, selfless, sacrificial caring for one another that goes against the grain of our fallen natures...the kind of love we see most fully expressed in Jesus.” To jump in and partner with God in the work He is doing.

How do we as followers of Jesus - how do we as a church - show ***hesed*** to those around us?

As I asked this question, my mind went back to late November when the virus became very active in this area, the hospitals were scrambling to find beds, those on staff were working long hours under incredibly stressful conditions.

As a staff, we were aware that large gatherings could serve as a means for a spreading of

the virus, putting the hospital employees under even more stress...and I remember us wrestling with how to respond. There were hours spent in formal staff meetings and informal staff meetings. Weighing, wrestling, praying...trying to discern what Jesus would have us do.

We all realized that there would be many different views with what would be an appropriate response... with individuals and yes, some churches looking at it this way and other individuals and churches look at it that way. And that's okay...what Jesus is leading one group of followers to do over here may not be same thing He has for another group of followers over there.

And so we were trying to discern what Jesus was saying to *us*. And as we talked and prayed, we felt that Jesus was leading us to hold off on large gatherings for a time. When discussions moved onto the level of the Church Board, again, everyone weighed in and the Board also felt that this was the path that we were to take.

But it didn't stop there...remember last week when we looked at how Boaz was challenged to "color outside the lines" and go above and beyond and seek God's true intent? In a similar way, the Board felt led to "color outside the lines" and go above and beyond and look for ways to show tangible support not just to the hospital employees, but to the community as well.

This was when the Board decided to purchase \$25 gift cards from local businesses and give one to every hospital employee in Waynesboro as an expression of kindness – showing **hesed**. The Board knew that a \$25 gift card would not help any hospital employee pay the rent, but would provide significant short term help to some local businesses.

A lot of people found themselves working in the midst of dark days, and it was our hope that by taking this step, displaying **hesed**, that hospital employees and restaurant owners and waiters, waitresses, cooks, dishwashers...would be reminded that God sees them and has not turned His back on them.

As a staff and as a Board, I just want to say how grateful we were for how supportive you were throughout this time. One aspect of **hesed** is sacrifice, and we knew that as a congregation we would need to be willing to sacrifice something that is very important to us, and that is gathering together in this room every Sunday morning. It didn't mean we could not continue to worship and serve, but these gatherings are the most important part of the week for many of us.

We were so grateful for the **hesed** you showed to us...the encouraging phone calls and the emails that were sent our way.

You know, it snowed on the day that we shared with all of you that we would not be holding Sunday services for a while, this information was sent out via email and it was on Facebook and on our website...a number of us on staff came in that afternoon to clear the sidewalks and steps around the church. After we were done, we just stood outside up here at the covered drop-off area, and the phone calls and emails of support had already started coming in, and I just remember how grateful we were and humbled by the response of our church family.

Even in the days to follow, when there were those who weren't sure if the right decision has been made, even these conversations were always cordial and thoughtful...some simply asking, "Do you really think we're doing the right thing?" This is the way it's supposed to work...we don't all think alike, but we talk with each other, show **hesed** to one another, and at the end of the day, we *all* thank Jesus for allowing us to join Him in the work He is doing in our lives, in our church, in our community.

This week, let's move about our homes, move about this community and as followers of Jesus, and live the way that God has always intended for us to live...selflessly, sacrificially...the kind of love we see most fully expressed in Jesus.

Next week we'll pick up where we left off, with Naomi grateful for the kindness she has been shown by Boaz, telling Ruth...

Ruth 2:20b "That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers.