

Ruth, Lady of Love

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Scripture 1: (Ruth 1:1-22 ESV)

In the days when the judges ruled there was a famine in the land, and a man of Bethlehem in Judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons.

These took Moabite wives; the name of the one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. They lived there about ten years, and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.

Then she arose with her daughters-in-law to return from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the fields of Moab that the LORD had visited his people and given them food. So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah.

But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The LORD grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!" Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.

And they said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people."

But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters; why will you go with me? Have I yet sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters; go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. If I should say I have hope, even if I should have a husband this night and should bear sons, would you therefore wait till they were grown? Would you therefore refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, for it is exceedingly bitter to me for your sake that the hand of the LORD has gone out against me."

Then they lifted up their voices and wept again. And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her. And she said, "See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law."

But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you."

And when Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more. So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. And when they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them. And the women said, "Is this Naomi?"

She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went away full, and the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi, when the LORD has testified against me and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?"

So Naomi returned, and Ruth the Moabite her daughter-in-law with her, who returned from the country of Moab. And they came to Bethlehem at the beginning of barley harvest.

Scripture 2: (Matt. 1:1-16 ESV)

The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.

Abraham was the father of Isaac, and Isaac the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, and Judah the father of Perez and Zerah by Tamar, and Perez the father of Hezron, and Hezron the father of Ram, and Ram the father of Amminadab, and Amminadab the father of Nahshon, and Nahshon the father of Salmon, and Salmon the father of Boaz by Rahab, and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king. And David was the father of Solomon by the wife of Uriah, and Solomon the father of Rehoboam, and Rehoboam the father of Abijah, and Abijah the father of Asaph, and Asaph the father of Jehoshaphat, and Jehoshaphat the father of Joram, and Joram the father of Uzziah, and Uzziah the father of Jotham, and Jotham the father of Ahaz, and Ahaz the father of Hezekiah, and Hezekiah the father of Manasseh, and Manasseh the father of Amos, and Amos the father of Josiah, and Josiah the father of Jechoniah and his brothers, at the time of the deportation to Babylon. And after the deportation to Babylon: Jechoniah was the father of Shealtiel, and Shealtiel the father of Zerubbabel, and Zerubbabel the father of Abiud, and Abiud the father of Eliakim, and Eliakim the father of Azor, and Azor the father of Zadok, and Zadok the father of Achim, and Achim the father of Eliud, and Eliud the father of Eleazar, and Eleazar the father of Matthan, and Matthan the father of Jacob, and Jacob the father of Joseph the husband of Mary, of whom Jesus was born, who is called Christ.

Sermon:

Ruth and her story is fitting for the Advent season because she is the great-grandmother of King David. Although her story is included within the canon of the Old Testament primarily because of that unique relationship, the whole narrative which surrounds her carries an even greater importance for our understanding of God's character because it establishes for us the foundation to understand HOW Jesus saves us {soteriology}, the redemption from our bondage to sin by an external agent, through a “kinsman redeemer” such as Boaz (Leviticus 25:23-28). Ruth's story presents us with many images that illuminate our salvation.

- We see the picture of Jesus Christ, God the Son, and His holy transaction of our redemption in Boaz and his purchase of Elimelech's property and the assumption of derivative obligation towards the widows: Naomi and Ruth.
- We can see the picture of us, of God's chosen people: sinners saved by grace; in the person of Ruth, whose life was “purchased for a price” (1 Cor 6:20) and whose continuing care and provision was secured by her redeemer, Boaz, through the covenantal bonds of marriage.
- Boaz and Ruth were united in the covenant of marriage: satisfying hope, and establishing peace through their relationship, and then strengthening it by love; which foreshadows the glorious picture of the Lamb's marriage to the Bride of Christ (Rev 19:7-9).

So it is right and good that we should refer to Ruth as a lady who typifies and is an exemplar of Godly love. However, we do run the serious risk of looking back into her story with rose colored glasses: of imposing our own human assumptions and ideals about love onto it; and so miss the beauty of God's love for Ruth and for the Church.

Ruth's story is not a romantic story. It is not a Hallmark Christmas movie, nor does it suit “Great American Family” either (the newer, more wholesome alternative to Hallmark). Ruth's story is not a romance, at least not in the commonly used modern sense; yet nonetheless, it remains a love story. It is a story of God's love for His chosen people and of His gracious provision for them. It is a story Naomi's love for Ruth as her daughter, and it is a story of Ruth's love for Naomi as her mother, and it is a story of Boaz's love for both Ruth and Naomi. Over and over, expressions of love appear throughout her story, yet the word “love” never appears in the whole book. Regardless, love is on full display because their love is expressed through actions, not words. Ruth is a story of, “Show me that you love me. Do not just tell me you love me.” and despite her story having a “happy ending”, it begins with disobedience and tragedy.

“*In the days when the judges ruled...*”, we all should have a good understanding of the story's setting, being now more familiar with that period of Israel's history. Unfortunately, the text does not say exactly when during the time of the judges, our story takes place. It offers little clue as to who was judging Israel at that time, nor does it tell us who Israel's great foe at the time was. However, the genealogy of Jesus {taken from Ruth 4:18-22} suggests that her story occurred early in the period. So, when we also consider the present prosperity of Moab, it is reasonable for us to assume that Elimelech probably took his family to Moab during the oppressive reign of the fat King Eglon, sometime between the judge Othniel and Ehud, the assassin.

Now first of all, who went to Moab? The man Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. Back then, names held a far greater importance and significance to the ancient Israelites than they do to us today {yet people spend lots of money to learn of some significance to their name in different languages, so maybe the “meaning of names” is more important to us than we want to admit.}; names carried meaning and conveyed information about the character of a person. Names were often chosen or given because of

circumstances that surrounded a person {such as Jacob being renamed Israel after he wrestled the angel, or by him originally being named Jacob because of how he clung to his brother's foot when they were being born} or because of a parent's hope for their child {Joseph, which means “he will increase” or Benjamin (whom Rachel wanted to be named Ben-oni, meaning “son of my sorrow/strength”), which means “son of my right hand”; both names given because of Jacob's preferential favor for Rachel and her sons}. Even moreso, the names of people {characters} within Hebrew narratives usually provide extra information about them, something intrinsic to them which was important for the hearer to know, but not always necessary to be said: like how Naomi asked to be called “Mara” instead of Naomi, because *marah* is a Hebrew word which means “bitterness” and Naomi felt that the LORD had dealt “bitterly” with her.

So what might their names tell us about these characters in our story?

- Elimelech is a compound name plainly meaning “my god is king”.
- Naomi comes from a root word meaning “kindness” (#5593).
- Mahlon/Machlon is from a root word meaning “sickness” (#4474).
- Chilion has a verbal root which can mean “annihilation”, “destruction”, or “failure” {or kidney, as reference to a body part offered in sacrifice or as representing a person's “secret self”} (#3794).

So, knowing how their story goes, these names are inauspicious and appropriately descriptive because all three men die in Moab. Elimelech is appropriate because he allows his fleshly nature, his sense of self reliance, to rule his life as king and god. Mahlon and Chilion's names are suggestive of how they died. While Naomi's name clearly describes her character in relation to Ruth and Orpah: her kindness towards them.

But why did Elimelech go to Moab in the first place? Why did he abandon God's Promised Land, for a land filled with pagans, idolaters, and the historic enemies of Israel? Because “... *there was a famine in the land...*”. He packed up his family and left home because of a famine; since he could not feed his family in Israel, he hoped that he could feed them in Moab.

Really, who can blame him? Who among us would not likely make a similar choice, if in a similar circumstance? How many of our great movements of people throughout American history were prompted by similar situations: such as those who abandoned their farms for the cities during the early 20th Century, or those who moved away from the original thirteen colonies and settled westward.

Elimelech had the duty and privilege to provide for his family, thus he did what he thought was best. He went where he expected his wife and sons to have the best chance of surviving and thriving. Ultimately, his choice was made out of love for his family.

However, by fleeing to Moab, he proved himself faithless to the God of Israel. He proved who his god truly was: proving it by whom he obeyed and allowed to rule his life as king; himself and his flesh. Elimelech abandoned the promises of the LORD, to seek the vain hope of bread and earthly provision. Rather than trust God, he chose to trust in himself and followed in the well-trodden footsteps of our ancient forebear, Adam. So he and his family left their home in Bethlehem and settled in a foreign land, in Moab “...*and remained there.*”. But then, “...*Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons.*”

Was his death divine judgment for his disobedience and faithlessness? Was he being punished for doing the wrong thing, for the right reasons? Or was his death, merely an ordinary human tragedy? It is difficult to say and I myself will refrain from issuing such a judgment at this time {Although my opinion/interpretation is that

this was divine discipline, especially when considering his sons afterwards, it often feels too easy to attribute every misfortune and tragedy to divine discipline, because then we run the risk of despair and of blaming and hating God}.

The point here is, Elimelech took his family to a foreign land and then he died there, leaving them stranded and in a lurch. They were far from home, and far from anyone who cared for them, and far from anyone who should have been willing to help them.

Naomi was a widow in Moab with two sons to care for, so what was she to do? Even today, a single mom with two boys, with two sons of any age, is not going to have an easy time of things; therefore, we really should not be surprised to learn that her sons took Moabite wives, something which has always been bad for Israelite men in the past (Numbers 25). But what really could Naomi do?

- She was a foreign widow, in a patriarchal society, dwelling among known oppressors of her people, with no social safety net.
- Her sons likely wanted to “fit in” with their neighbors, probably denying their Israelite heritage and conforming to Moabite culture. As men, they almost certainly held more social power than their mother.
- But still, she was their Mom and because of her love for them, she surely wanted them to be happy; so she allowed it, especially since she could not stop it.

So, this family of expatriate Israelites from Bethlehem, “*They lived there about ten years, and both Mahlon and Chilion died, so that the woman was left without her two sons and her husband.*”. Now Naomi was left totally alone, without either a husband or a son to support, protect, or comfort her. {This is the second reason why I am inclined towards divine discipline, because as the new men in charge of the household, they could have/should have directed them to return to Israel. If it was a question of faith and faithfulness, then returning home would have actually been an act of repentance (Hebrew *shuv*; to repent or to return), but they did not.}. She was alone in the household, except for her son's widows. Three widows, sharing together in misfortune and misery was a pitiable circumstance. There were very few options available to women like them in the ancient Near East {which is one reason why the Old Testament is such a positive, pro-women document; the Law of Moses makes express provisions for the care and support of widows and orphans in Israelite communities}, and any support which they might have had from their dowries would soon run out; plus, they may or may not have been welcomed or accepted back into their father's households, even as young widows.

But then: after her husband had died, after her two sons had died, after having lived for ten years in Moab as a “*stranger in a strange land*” (Exodus 2:22 KJV); Naomi heard that things were much better, back home in Bethlehem. The famine was over and things were now going well for Israel in Canaan. So Naomi made the only logical decision available to her: to return to her homeland of Israel where she possessed property, through her husband, and from which she could expect some income, and to return her daughters-in-law back to their families of origin, where they might reset and restart their lives with a different husband. Sending them back to their parent's household was really the most kind and loving thing that Naomi could do for them.

“*So she set out from the place where she was with her two daughters-in-law, and they went on the way to return to the land of Judah. But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go, return each of you to her mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The LORD grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!" Then she kissed them, and they lifted up their voices and wept.*

And they said to her, "No, we will return with you to your people."”

Now here is a moment when we need to reflect a little on the context. We do not know how old any of these characters were, or how long Naomi's sons were married. But overall, the text says that they were in Moab for ten years, which most likely means that they were there ten years from the time when Elimelech brought them there; so their sons were probably not married for very long, a few years at most. During ancient times in the near east, grooms were typically older than their brides, aged around 18-20. They were old enough to have learned a trade and had begun to earn an income. Women were married younger, often much younger, like in their early teens once they old enough to begin bearing children. So, if Naomi was herself married by age 15 {which could be considered late} and bore both of her sons by the age of 18, she would have been around 40 by the time both of her sons were married by the age of 20.

When we consider these three widows we need to understand that this family matriarch was most likely only in her 40's, while her two widowed daughter-in-laws were still probably teenagers (age 20 at most). {This is such an unfortunate circumstance which might have reasonably pushed a woman into the prostitution trade, by necessity; being widowed, without children, and without other male familial support.} So then, once we recognize that context, it reframes the whole of Ruth's story into a more proper perspective, because even if Naomi considered herself to be a “bitter old woman”, she was not really that old even for that time period; her “way of women” may not have even ceased yet. Meanwhile, Ruth was still a young girl with a lot of life ahead of her, and she should have had a lot of hopes, anticipations, and expectations left within her; she was far too young a person to give up on the future. This then would also put Ruth's nocturnal visit to Boaz in another light {perhaps casting her in the role of seductress, in the eyes of some} and it also increases his status because of how he responded to her, emphasizing his chastity, generosity, and righteousness.

Lastly, another reason to pause and consider this part of this context of age is because both women portray pictures of Mary, the mother of Jesus {typological}.

- Ruth is like Mary, the bride to be, who upon receiving life changing news commits herself to obedience and service all on account of faith, as Ruth committed herself to Naomi upon the death of her husband.
- Naomi is like Mary, the mother watching her firstborn son dying upon a Roman cross, being executed as a criminal, and experiencing the bitterness of a {sword piercing her soul} (Luke 2:35), yet still not giving into despair; still clinging to her hope in the LORD, as Naomi sought the comfort and provision of her people and God.

Now back in Moab, since Naomi had decided to return to Bethlehem where she had kinfolk on whom she might depend, it is really surprising that her daughters would want to go with her because at their age, their widowhood should not have been too great of negative stigma {but it likely would have carried some, assuming their status as divine punishment for something}. But, Naomi was as wise as she was kind. So, even expecting that while there might have been some little hope for her in Israel, she knew that there would be no hope for these two Moabite girls in Bethlehem. When the people would learn where they were from, they would be shunned, because their very presence would constantly be reminding everyone of the wicked “daughters of Moab” who seduced the men of Israel into Ba'alite idolatry at Peor. No decent Israelite suitor would consider them “acceptable” as a wife. These girls surely had a better chance of future happiness in Moab because, as young widows, they remained suitable, potential brides; they were widows without fault in themselves. So, with the utmost of love, she blessed them and she tried to send them off, “*May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. The LORD grant that you may find rest, each of you in the house of her husband!*”, but they refused. They insisted that they ought to stay with Naomi.

I am sure these girls loved their mother in law. They were clearly devoted to Naomi, being willing to leave home and follow her into the unknown. They had fond affection for her, since they were no longer duty bound to her after the death of their husbands. They felt for her as much as she felt for them, but as our story will show only Ruth truly, totally, and completely loved Naomi.

Naomi reasoned with them a second time, pointing out the hopelessness of her having sons in the future whom they might marry {Levirite marriage (Deut 25:5-10)}, encouraging them to consider the time which must pass before that could even become a possibility: 18-20 years minimum, from that very moment. They would each have to wait a lifetime and by then, the vigors of their youth would have also passed. Following Naomi to Bethlehem was an unreasonable proposition for these girls when they had a more reasonable, earthly hope by remaining in Moab.

Hearing Naomi's counsel, the girls wept in sorrow and Orpah was convinced. *“And Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.”*. Despite her fond feelings for Naomi, Orpah sensibly returned home. She chose the pragmatic and logical option available to her. She returned and remained in Moab, while Ruth declared and affirmed her devotion for Naomi and announced her single-minded determination to remain with her. Then we hear what I believe is the greatest verbal expression of love recorded in Scripture.

“For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you.”

Remember again, the word for “love” appears nowhere within the book of Ruth, yet here the ideal of love is very much evident.

When we need to think about what love is, we should not think about the Apostle Paul and 1st Corinthians 13 first, because the things written in that list are not actually what love “is”, but they are what love does or inspires us to do:

- *“Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.”* (1 Cor. 13:4-8 ESV)

Those are examples of what love “does” and of how love is “expressed”. Each are good consequences of love.

Perhaps it is the Apostle John instead, who better defines what love truly “is” for us, between his letters and his Gospel.

- *“Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.”* (Jn. 15:13 ESV)
- *“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another.”* (1 Jn. 4:7-11 ESV)
- *“So we have come to know and to believe the love that God has for us. God is love, and whoever abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. By this is love perfected with us, so that we may have confidence for the day of judgment, because as he is so also are we in this world. There is no fear in*

love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love. We love because he first loved us.” (1 Jn. 4:16-19 ESV)

- *“And this is love, that we walk according to his commandments...”* (2 Jn. 1:6 ESV)

Love is willing self sacrifice. Love is considering others of greater importance and value than of yourself. Love is obedience to and satisfying the will, needs, and desires of another person; especially those of the LORD God.

OK. Maybe I cheated a little. Maybe I was being a bit more like Paul there, because my three “Love is's” are also expressions of love, rather than love itself. “God is love” may be better or best understood as, “God loves...”. God alone truly exemplifies the divine attribute of love. All of our “loves” are just pale initiations, so we must always remain careful to not ever confuse things and begin to think that “Love is god”.

Although Ruth is never recorded saying, “I love you” to Naomi, everything that she promises her clearly shows and expresses, “I love you” in a Godly way. She promises to stay with her, to obey her, and to share everything with her: good or bad. Ruth freely, gladly, and graciously chose to bind herself to Naomi, in covenant, without any hope or demand or expectation of return. She identified herself with Naomi almost as closely as Adam identified himself with Eve, *“This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.”* (Gen. 2:23 ESV), which is why Ruth's declaration is another common marriage text.

Maybe that is what love actually is; what is truly means to love? To willingly binding yourself to another person by covenant, without any conditions or restrictions, or even the requirement of reciprocation?

As Christians, we believe:

- that Jesus Christ, God the Son, bound Himself in covenant with God the Father, to secure our redemption from sin (the Covenant of Redemption, Ephesians 1:3-14) before the foundation of the world: promising to God that He would be our Savior, before we ever even needed to be saved; because of His great love for us (John 15:13).
- that God bound Himself in covenant with Abraham (the Covenant of Grace; Genesis 15 and 17), promising to give him: a people, a land and home; and promising that through him and his offspring, all peoples would become blessed; *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”* (Jn. 3:16 ESV). Therefore, we know that because of Abraham's faith, God has justified him along with everyone who believes as Abraham did, giving us the gift of eternal life through the work of Jesus Christ.

That is what love is. The Creator promising to give us everything, even though we possess nothing which He needs; possessing nothing to give Him in return which is not already His own. That is *agape*. That is the providence of God, alone. Thus now the godly continue to echo our heavenly Father by loving others in this same way, all because He has first loved us.

Ruth's freely given devotion to Naomi is a picture of Jesus Christ's love and devotion to us. Even when we sinfully insist and try to send Him away and exile Him from our lives, He remains faithful, and He keeps His promises, and He will continue to always remain with us and care for us. Did He not make that very promise to the disciples and also to us? *“And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”* (Matt. 28:20 ESV).

So, when Ruth declared, *“For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there will I be buried.”* she was promising to love Naomi as she loved herself. Ruth was choosing to sacrifice everything she knew and expected for a terribly

uncertain future with Naomi; a future appearing to be without either hope or peace, and still she faithfully binds herself to Naomi, Naomi's people, and Naomi's God in love, for love.

Just as Ruth now took the place of both Mahlon and Chilion, as Naomi's daughter in truth, not only by marriage but by promise and adoption, so we too become God's beloved children in truth and gain the place of Jesus Christ, our Brother.

Ruth was united to Naomi through her devotion and faith. She identified herself with her, but even though she continued to be known as “Ruth, the Moabite”, she no longer identified herself with her past country, people, or gods. Instead she claimed and was claimed by Naomi. She belonged to the house of Elimelech, from the tribe of Judah. She belonged to Israel and the LORD God.

Therefore, when Boaz, Naomi's kinsman-redeemer, purchased Elimelech's property (dutifully redeeming it, so as to keep it within the tribe of Judah, and purchasing it as a means to responsibly support Naomi) he also took on responsibility for Ruth, because she belonged to Elimelech's household and Naomi's “daughter-in-love”. Yet, while Naomi was an Israelite, belonging to the tribe of Judah, her kinsman-redeemer Boaz was duty bound, by familial obligation, to support her and to “do right by her”, but Ruth did not by right of nature. She could not expect to enjoy those same privileged benefits.

Ruth was a foreign woman, a Moabite, and presumably an {reformed?} idolater. Moabites were an anathematized people within Israel “*No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of them may enter the assembly of the LORD forever...*” (Deut. 23:3 ESV). Yet still, Ruth legally belonged to the house of Elimelech and so legally, Boaz was now required to support her. He could have kept her as a servant, a contemporary role which could have been appropriately gracious for such a Moabite woman. Or he could have married her off, back into foreign lands by paying her dowry and thus discharge his obligation. But instead, because of her faithfulness to Naomi: because of her love for Naomi; not only did Boaz redeem her, but he also chose to promote her as his wife. He brought Ruth into his household, his family and his heart, and then he united her into his people, Israel, all in and for love.

Finally, to summarize the story:

- Leaving Moab, Naomi's hope and trust was in Israel and Israel's God. Through her covenantal love for Naomi, Ruth's hope and trust was converted into hope and trust in Israel and Israel's God. Ruth believed because of Naomi's example of faith. Therefore, her faith was she placed where Naomi's faith was, in the LORD and in His good providence. Ruth placed her faith in the love of God.
- God's loving providence came to Naomi and Ruth through their kinsman-redeemer. They were redeemed by Boaz's free act of mercy and grace, through his willing satisfaction of the Law's demand after he had first covenanted to do so.
- Then, free from any further legal obligation, Boaz's mercy and grace went beyond the requirements of duty because in love, he chose to bind himself to Ruth in the covenant of marriage, and thereby claimed Naomi as his second mother. {Perhaps this act of mercy and grace should be less surprising to us when we consider who Boaz is the son of. Boaz is the son of Rahab, the former prostitute in Jericho. Boaz is the son of a woman grafted into Israel and united to God's people according to God's grace. Since his father, Salmon, was willing to love a foreign woman and make her an Israelite, Boaz was just following in his father's footsteps; a family tradition, as it were.}

So, the story of Ruth truly is a story of love, because apart from love, nobody would ever do any of these things. They were true selflessness. They were truly considering others before their own selves. They went against our

sinful human nature. They went against all reason-ability and logic. Their choices made no sense to normal human comprehension. Their decisions and choices could not have been predicted or anticipated by any mere human person. Thus the only possible explanation is love.

It is frequently said that “Love makes people do crazy things”, and the people who say that are correct. We do crazy things on account of love. We will do almost anything for love. It makes no sense to us, yet it makes sense to God.

Apart from God's love, the story of Ruth makes no sense at all and it is otherwise, an impossible story to believe. Yet still, because of God's love for His chosen people, God's people choose to love like God as we love God.

- Because God loves us, we know that Jesus loved Ruth and Boaz and Naomi from back before the foundation of the world.
- Because Jesus loves them, Naomi loved Ruth and Ruth loved Naomi and Boaz loved both of them.
- Because God loves His people, Israel, He provided a redeemer for Naomi and because God loves all the world, which includes the Gentiles, He also provided a redeemer for Ruth and brought her into the family of God as a wife, a mother, and an ancestor of King David and also our Savior, Jesus “...*and Boaz the father of Obed by Ruth, and Obed the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David the king.*”.
- Because God loves His chosen people, Israel: because Jesus loves His Church; God gave Him for us as our Redeemer; born as a man, to thus be our kinsman-redeemer because He shares in our humanity. Jesus purchased our redemption from sin by trading His sinless life for our justified demise; then, once free from any possible debt or moral obligation, Jesus has claimed His beloved Church by grace and He has taken us to be His chosen Bride.
- Because Jesus loves us so much, He has taken and suffered all that we justly deserve, and has instead given us His perfect righteousness, His glory, and the love of our heavenly Father which we do not rightly deserve.

That is what we should remember to celebrate this advent. Since we are loved by Christ, since we are loved as Ruth was loved, we should love others likewise.

So, let us all thank God, and sing His praises because of the great, promised hope of peace and love which He has given us in and through Jesus Christ.

AMEN