

**SERMON NOTES**  
**Ruth 1-4**  
**“God’s Kindness to the Vulnerable”**

**Intro:**

Ely - Nicky - chain - would get her chain wrapped around the tree in the yard  
*-keep going around the tree the same way - shorter & shorter chain*  
 -”Nicky - **COME**” - come at us till she would choke herself / but would not reverse her tracks to get free

C.S. Lewis likened God's use of adversity to walking a dog. If the dog gets its leash wrapped around a pole and tries to continue running forward, he will only tighten the leash more. *Both the dog and the owner are after the same end, forward motion, but the owner must resist the dog by pulling him opposite the direction he wants to go.* The master, sharing the same intention but understanding better than the dog where he really wants to go, takes an action precisely opposite to that of the dog's will. *It is in this way that God uses adversity.*

- **That is how God uses adversity - taking us where we do not want to go in order to bring us where we can fulfill our life’s purpose**
- *In the book of Ruth, we see Naomi and Ruth going to a place of adversity and emptiness where they did not want to go, before ending up by God's gracious Providence in a place of fullness and blessing and purpose*
- *Naomi and Ruth were the epitome of Vulnerable women = alone, insecure, weak, helpless, hopeless, empty, needy*
- *Ruth is the story of the vulnerable experiencing God’s Hesed = kindness, unflinching love, mercy, compassion, faithfulness, loyalty, generosity*

**I. MISERY AND EMPTINESS**

- ***Naomi’s losses and aloneness (1:1-5)***
- **No self-respecting Jew would ever want to live in Moab on the other side of the Jordan and the Dead Sea**
- ***Moabites were the descendants of Lot’s incest with his daughter***
- ***They were regarded as an unclean people, and Jews and Moabites had a long history of mutual hostility and suspicion***

- But when famine struck the land of Judah, Elimelech took his wife Naomi and their two sons to live for a while in Moab
- *This took place during the period of the Judges – a period of apostasy and moral degradation in Israel and Judah*
- It is quite likely that we are to understand that this famine was sent by God as a disciplinary action for Israel's unfaithfulness to God
  
- *Elimelech's decision to leave the Promised Land and go to Moab in search of a better life would have been frowned upon by most Jews – and perhaps by God Himself*
- The move led to Naomi losing everything of value to her:
  - *First, she lost her homeland and her people – transplanted to Moab where she was a minority and immigrant in a strange and hostile land*
  - Then Naomi lost her husband, Elimelech, and she became a widow dependent for support on her two sons
  - *Then her two sons married Moabite women – a mixed marriage in every sense and frowned upon by most Jews*
  - Though such a marriage was not strictly prohibited in the Law of Moses, the offspring of a Jewish – Moabite union would be forbidden up to the 10<sup>th</sup> generation from entering the Tabernacle or Temple for worship
  
- *As it turned out, these two marriages were childless for 10 years, and then Naomi's two sons died*
- With no husband, no children and no grandchildren – and living in a foreign country – Naomi was in a very vulnerable and destitute situation
  
- **Naomi's emptiness was now complete:** she had lost everything – *her home, her husband, her sons, all hope for her future*
- All she had left were two daughters-in-law – and they were Moabites, widows, and childless
- *All the men in Naomi's life were gone – prematurely – and so was the family line with no offspring to carry on the family name or inheritance*
- There was nothing for Naomi in Moab – but there was nothing for her in famine-plagued Judah either – she was left with no good options
  
- **God's Provision (1:6)**

**Ruth 1:6 (NIV)** <sup>6</sup>When she heard in Moab that the LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, Naomi and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there.

- **Naomi's home was Bethlehem – meaning “house of bread” or “house of food”**
- **She left Bethlehem because there was a famine and no food there**
- **But now the Lord had graciously come to the aid of His people by providing food for them**
- **Naomi's decision to return home (1:6-14)**

Grief-stricken and destitute, Naomi decided to go back home to Bethlehem

*-At first her daughters-in-law followed her on the journey*

*-but Naomi repeatedly urged them to return to their original homes and families in Moab*

*-Naomi had nothing to offer them / and they had nothing to offer Naomi*

*-the prospects of these Moabite women finding a husband in Judah would be slim indeed – and Naomi was too old to provide them with any more sons*

*-they would be better off staying in Moab with their own people*

In that society, **widows were very vulnerable** – they were not only lonely but also poor and helpless and powerless and susceptible to unjust treatment and neglect

*-the best hope for a widow was to remarry - and the best hope for Orpah and Ruth to remarry and have a family was in Moab among their own people*

Orpah was persuaded by Naomi to return to her Moabite people - but not Ruth

- **Ruth clings to Naomi and her God (1:14-18)**

Ruth clung to Naomi

*-even though Naomi could offer Ruth no future prospects except a share in her desolation, Ruth clung to Naomi*

*-whatever Naomi's hardships, Ruth would share them*

*-furthermore, Ruth would share in Naomi's faith*

**Ruth 1:16 - 17 (NIV)** <sup>16</sup>But Ruth replied, “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. <sup>17</sup>Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me.”

- Your people will be my people and your God my God.
- That is an amazing statement in light of what Naomi had just said about God:

**Ruth 1:13** “Things are far more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD himself has caused me to suffer.”

Naomi’s faith in the sovereignty of God was such that she attributed both good fortune and misfortune to the hand of God

*-without abandoning her faith, Naomi expressed her feelings honestly to God and to others*

- Naomi was no spiritual giant
- *Her attitude and her perspective left much to be desired*
- But in the midst of her bitterness – she did not disengage from her relationship with God
- *She may have been angry with God – but she did not walk out on Him – she did not quit – she did not abandon her faith*

### **Naomi’s faith was an authentic though imperfect faith**

*-There was no pretense of false spirituality in Naomi*

Sheila Walsh - “*Honestly*”:

**“One of the questions I continue to wrestle with is “What is real faith?”**

*-In our desire to be an inspiration to one another, we often veil what is true, because what is true is not always inspirational. But hurting believers whose lives are in tatters often need real help. If we were able to put aside our need for approval long enough to be authentic, then, surely, we would be living as the church.*

“Sometimes we encourage one another to be inauthentic... At a church meeting my mother attended, a young woman who had just lost a baby stood up and gave thanks for the trials in her life, giving glory to the Lord, that in him there is no need to grieve; we can continue to march on victoriously.

*-My mother was horrified by this woman’s apparent indifference to the loss of her child, but the rest of the congregation clapped in approval.*

--After the service ended, my mom heard someone in the bathroom weeping bitterly in one of the cubicles. It was the mother who, having done the spiritual thing, was now expressing her genuine emotions all alone in a dark place.

***-It makes me angry to think that someone in such terrible pain had to weep alone.”***

*Naomi’s faith was authentic enough to express bitter anger at God for having brought such bitter misfortune and affliction and emptiness to her life*

*-in Naomi’s mind, this misfortune was not merely fate or bad luck*

*-this was the hand of God afflicting her - and she was protesting bitterly*

- ***Two vulnerable widows arrive in Bethlehem (1:19 -22)***

**Ruth 1:19 - 21 (NIV)** <sup>19</sup>So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, “Can this be Naomi?” <sup>20</sup>“Don’t call me Naomi,” she told them. “Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. <sup>21</sup>I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The LORD has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.”

- ***“Naomi” means “pleasant” – “Mara” means “bitter”***
- ***Naomi left Bethlehem full – She came back to Bethlehem empty***
- ***And she placed the blame directly on God for her affliction and emptiness***
- ***Naomi had some justification for being full of self-pity***
- ***Single women and widows in those days had very few options***
- ***They could live with their father // they could remarry / they could be supported by their children / very few could support themselves with some kind of craft or trade***
- ***None of those options was open to Naomi – no father / no husband / no children or grandchildren and past childbearing age // and no craft or trade***
- ***No man would want to marry an older widow like Naomi***
- ***And what Israelite man would want to marry a Moabitess widow like Ruth?***
- ***Naomi was indeed vulnerable – but she was not quite as empty as she believed***
- ***For she had Ruth – a loyal daughter-in-law of strong character – who would become the instrument God would use to show His kindness to Naomi***
- ***The Providence of God (2:1-4)***

The irony is that it was while Naomi was at her bitterest - even wanting to change her name from Naomi to Mary, that God began extending his healing and restoring grace to her through Ruth and Boaz

**Ruth 2:1-3** Now there was a wealthy and influential man in Bethlehem named Boaz, who was a relative of Naomi’s husband, Elimelech.

<sup>2</sup>One day Ruth said to Naomi, “Let me go out into the fields to gather leftover grain behind anyone who will let me do it.”

And Naomi said, “All right, my daughter, go ahead.” <sup>3</sup>So Ruth went out to gather grain behind the harvesters. And as it happened, she found herself working in a field that belonged to Boaz, the relative of her father-in-law, Elimelech.

- “And as it just so happened by chance,” -- the author writes with full irony

-There was nothing chance about that happenstance

**-That was the providence of God bringing Ruth and Boaz together**

*-Ruth met Boaz in what seemed to her to be a purely accidental way, but behind that seemingly chance encounter was the caring purpose of a gracious God*

God graciously brought into the lives of these two destitute widows a man of wealth and godly character who was also a kinsman

*-Boaz would become God’s instrument of showing kindness to and taking care of the material needs of Naomi and Ruth*

### **I too know the joy of experiencing God’s gracious providence**

*-Like Naomi and Ruth returning empty from Moab, in 1994 we returned to Iowa empty and broken from California*

*-we came here with nothing - and with no prospects of a job or a pastorate*

*-but as it just so happened, the day after we arrived at Beth’s parents’ home in Davenport, they happened to invite their church organist over for dinner*

*-Harlan Vander Vinne just so happened to be an English teacher at NSHS and knew that Deac Ryan was chairman of Cornerstone’s pulpit committee searching for a pastor*

*-he said he would put in a good word for me*

*-and then, as it just so happened, a couple of days later Mark and Lori Peterson had us over for dessert*

*-I was Mark’s pastor in Ely before he came to the Quad-Cities with YFC and then became youth pastor at Homewood E-Free*

*-Mark also knew Deac and said he would put in a good word for me*

*--and the rest is history*

Coincidence? Happenstance? Chance? Accidental encounters?

*-I don’t think so*

**-I would call it the gracious providence of God - showing grace and kindness in restoring me from emptiness and brokenness to fullness and blessing**

- **The Generosity of Boaz (2:4-18)**

*Ruth took the initiative to put herself in a vulnerable position by gleaning the leftovers of the harvest in the fields*

- **A young Moabitess woman – alone – would have been vulnerable to all kinds of mistreatment, prejudice, abuse and sexual harassment**
- ***But Boaz took notice of her // fed her // protected her // and provided for her***

- The Law of Moses made provision for widows, the fatherless, and aliens to be able to glean in the fields during harvest time
- **But Boaz went way beyond the letter of the law and the call of duty in how he protected and provided for the vulnerable immigrant widow from Moab**
- *Boaz graciously allowed Ruth to stick close to the servant girls in his fields, to drink freely of the men's water jars, and he ordered the men not to touch her or harass her in any way*

***Boaz' kindness to Ruth was the human manifestation of the divine wings of refuge mentioned in Ruth 2:12***

**Ruth 2:10-12** Ruth fell at his feet and thanked him warmly. "Why are you being so kind to me?" she asked. "I am only a foreigner."

<sup>11</sup>"Yes, I know," Boaz replied. "But I also know about the love and kindness you have shown your mother-in-law since the death of your husband. I have heard how you left your father and mother and your own land to live here among complete strangers. <sup>12</sup>May the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge, reward you fully."

- *When Ruth brought an abundance of grain home to Naomi at the end of the day and told her of Boaz' kindness and generosity, Naomi recognized the hand of God*

**Ruth 2:18 - 20 (NIV)** <sup>18</sup>She carried it back to town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gathered. Ruth also brought out and gave her what she had left over after she had eaten enough. <sup>19</sup>Her mother-in-law asked her, "Where did you glean today? Where did you work? Blessed be the man who took notice of you!" Then Ruth told her mother-in-law about the one at whose place she had been working. "The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz," she said. <sup>20</sup>"The LORD bless him!" Naomi said to her daughter-in-law. "He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead." She added, "That man is our close relative; he is one of our kinsman-redeemers."

- *This is the turning point for Naomi*
- The healing of her bitterness is beginning
- *Her emptiness is on the verge of turning into fullness and blessing*
- ***Naomi's heart and life were being transformed by God's unmerited kindness being expressed through Boaz' generosity to Ruth***

*-when Naomi was at her lowest – and was bitter and angry toward God -- God graciously took the initiative to restore fullness and joy and blessing to Naomi's life*

## II. SATISFACTION AND FULLNESS

- ***The Hesed of God (2:19 – 20)***

**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.”

- *Who is the “He” who has shown kindness? Boaz or God?*
- *The Hebrew grammar is ambiguous – perhaps purposefully so – because it is God showing His Hesed Kindness through the generosity of Boaz*
- *The word translated “kindness” here is “Hesed”*
- *It is one of the most important words in the OT and is variously translated as *lovingkindness // unfailing love // mercy // steadfast love**
- *Hesed is a characteristic of God – rooted in the divine nature – that God’s people are to practice in human relationships as an expression of godliness*
- *Hesed springs from and is based on a covenant relationship – expressing a deep and abiding loyalty*
- *Hesed is not just an emotion but is expressed in actions of meeting real and practical needs*
- *Hesed normally refers to an act of kindness or mercy or generosity on the part of a stronger person to help a weaker person in need*
- *Two-thirds of the OT occurrences are God’s Hesed to humans – one-third of the occurrences refer to acts of kindness and generosity such as Boaz’ toward Ruth*
- ***Hesed is an essential attribute of God and is at the core of what it means to be a godly person***

**Micah 6:8 (NIV)** <sup>8</sup> He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy (*Hesed*) and to walk humbly with your God.

- ***It is often through human acts of kindness and mercy that God shows His Hesed to the vulnerable and needy***
- ***Ruth showed Hesed to Naomi by clinging to her and coming with her back to Bethlehem // and Boaz showed Hesed to Ruth by providing for and protecting a vulnerable Moabite widow***

- *Showing kindness to the alien, the refugee, the fatherless, the widow and other vulnerable people are godly actions that display the heart and character of our heavenly Father*

**James 1:27 (NIV)** <sup>27</sup>Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

- *Caring for the needs of orphans and widows in their distress is an expression of God's Hesed and therefore is pure and faultless religious faith at work and an expression of true godliness*
- ***The Plan of Naomi (2:21 – 3:4)***
- *After two months of gleaning, Naomi and Ruth had plenty of food to eat, but the harvest was ending, and Ruth and Naomi were still living together as two vulnerable widows*
- *Naomi devised a plan to change that vulnerable status and to give Ruth a more secure future*
- *Naomi instructed Ruth to bathe, put on perfumed oil, and put on a nice dress that would indicate that her period of mourning is over, and she is once again eligible for marriage*
- *Ruth was to wait until Boaz had his fill of food and drink and then retired alone to the threshing floor to guard his grain*
- *After he was asleep, Ruth was to uncover his feet and legs and lie down close beside him*
- *In that culture, that was the equivalent of a marriage proposal*
- ***The Proposal of Ruth (3:5-9)***
- *Ruth did as instructed and carried out the plan*
- *She made herself presentable, approached the sleeping Boaz on the threshing floor, uncovered his legs, and lay down next to him*
- *This was NOT an attempt by Ruth to seduce Boaz into having sex that night*
- *Rather, this was a culturally acceptable way of letting Boaz know that Ruth was available to become his wife*
- *But the plan was not without some risks:*

- *Boaz – a wealthy and powerful Israelite landowner – could have belittled and mocked this proposal from a poor widowed Moabitess*
- *Boaz could have accused Ruth of being a whore trying to seduce him*
- *Boaz could have seduced Ruth and had his way with her sexually without any fear of reprisals*
- *Boaz even could have raped Ruth and gotten away with it – who would take the word of a Moabitess immigrant over a prominent Israelite?*
- *How would Boaz respond to this rather forward move on Ruth's part?*
- ***The Integrity of Boaz (3:10-15)***
- *Boaz was in the perfect position to take advantage of Ruth in any way he pleased – he could even say that she was asking for it*
- *How did Boaz respond when he woke up in the middle of the night with this young widow lying beside him?*

**Ruth 3:9-13** <sup>9</sup>“Who are you?” he demanded.

“I am your servant Ruth,” she replied. “Spread the corner of your covering over me, for you are my family redeemer.”

<sup>10</sup>“The LORD bless you, my daughter!” Boaz exclaimed. “You are showing more family loyalty now than ever by not running after a younger man, whether rich or poor. <sup>11</sup>Now don’t worry about a thing, my daughter. I will do what is necessary, for everyone in town knows you are an honorable woman. <sup>12</sup>But there is one problem. While it is true that I am one of your family redeemers, there is another man who is more closely related to you than I am. <sup>13</sup>Stay here tonight, and in the morning I will talk to him. If he is willing to redeem you, then let him marry you. But if he is not willing, then as surely as the LORD lives, I will marry you! Now lie down here until morning.”

- *Boaz understood Ruth's intentions – and he blessed her*
- *He interpreted her actions as an act of kindness – Heseb*
- *Why?*
- *Though no ages are given, it is clear that Boaz is older than Ruth*
- *Ruth was perhaps late 20s or 30 or so, and Boaz was middle-aged*
- *Ruth could have sought marriage with a younger man*
- *Boaz was pleased that Ruth has chosen him*
- *By the way, when Ruth requests Boaz to “spread the corner of his garment over her” – the word for garment is the same word translated “wings” in 2:12*

**Ruth 2:12 (NIV)** <sup>12</sup>May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.”

- *Ruth had put herself under Yahweh’s wings when she came to Judah – now she was requesting to put herself under Boaz’ protection by requesting him to be her husband*
- *And Boaz accepted Ruth’s proposal – except for one problem:*
- *There was another man who was a closer relative of Elimelech’s and would have the first right to claim Ruth as his wife according to the law of levirate marriage*
- *According to this law, when a man died without having any children, his brother or nearest unmarried relative had the right and responsibility to marry the widow to carry on the family line and to keep the man’s property in the family*
- *This man was known as the “Kinsman-Redeemer” who was responsible to redeem family property sold to pay debts or to redeem relatives sold into slavery or to marry the wife of the deceased relative or to care for an older widow in the clan*
- *Being a man of integrity, Boaz needed to offer to this other man the first right of refusal for Naomi’s property and for Ruth as his wife*
- ***The Shrewdness of Boaz (4:1-12)***
- *The next day Boaz went to the town gate to take care of this business*
- *The first-in-line “Kinsman-Redeemer” just happened to come along, and Boaz explained the situation to him – in front of 10 witnesses*
- *First Boaz mentioned the availability of the property belonging to Naomi’s husband Elimelech*
- *The man was interested in purchasing it*
- *Then Boaz mentioned that with the property comes the Moabite widow Ruth as his wife*
- *Technically, the man could have acquired the property without marrying Ruth, but Boaz wanted to make sure that Ruth was taken care of too*
- *This was another manifestation of Boaz’ Hesed*
- *Thinking only of himself and his financial interests, the man declined the offer and gave to Boaz full rights both to the property and to Ruth, which Boaz gladly accepted*

- ***The Faithfulness of God (4:13-17)***

**Ruth 4:13-17** So Boaz married Ruth and took her home to live with him. When he slept with her, the LORD enabled her to become pregnant, and she gave birth to a son. <sup>14</sup>And the women of the town said to Naomi, “Praise the LORD who has given you a family redeemer today! May he be famous in Israel. <sup>15</sup>May this child restore your youth and care for you in your old age. For he is the son of your daughter-in-law who loves you so much and who has been better to you than seven sons!”

<sup>16</sup>Naomi took care of the baby and cared for him as if he were her own. <sup>17</sup>The neighbor women said, “Now at last Naomi has a son again!” And they named him Obed. He became the father of Jesse and the grandfather of David.

- ***The book of Ruth begins with Naomi’s losses and emptiness – and ends with Naomi’s blessings and fullness***
- ***Naomi had lost home, husband, and children***
- ***And now she is back home in Bethlehem with her daughter-in-law married to a husband of noble character, and whereas her sons died in Moab and her daughters-in-law were infertile in Moab – now in Bethlehem Ruth and Boaz conceive and give birth to a son within the first year of their marriage***
- ***And Naomi raised this son and cared for him as her own***
- ***The family line of Elimelech and Naomi – tracing back to Perez and Judah – had almost died out***
- ***But now a son is born to the Kinsman-Redeemer Boaz and to the Moabite widow Ruth***
- ***And not just any son***
- ***This son – Obed – became the grandfather of King David***
- ***And this family line – including the Moabite Ruth – is the family line of Jesus the Messiah***
- ***The family line of Jesus is marked by God’s Hesed Kindness to the Vulnerable***

(Conclusion)

- ***The book of Ruth is not a theological treatise – it is a story – a true story – a love story about King David’s great-grandparents – a lovely story set during a time of spiritual darkness and moral degradation in the history of Israel***
- ***And yet for those who have eyes to see – the story clearly reveals the heart and character of God to be full of Hesed – full of mercy and compassion and lovingkindness toward the most vulnerable of society***

- Naomi leaves Judah with a husband and two sons – and comes back empty and bitter and grieving and depressed
- *She is all alone in the world – except for her daughter-in-law Ruth, a young Moabitess widow who is just as vulnerable and helpless as Naomi*
- These two widows are weak, helpless, insecure, needy, forgotten, lonely, crushed by life's hardships
- *They arrive in Bethlehem as bruised reeds and smoldering wicks*
  
- **Just the kind of vulnerable people that God loves to show kindness and compassion to**
- *When Naomi and Ruth felt alone and forsaken and unloved and totally uncared for – Yahweh had his eye on them – He saw their tears – and He acted through Boaz to show His lovingkindness to Naomi and Ruth*
  
- Some of you here today may be able to identify with Naomi or Ruth
- *Do not give up hope – you have a Father in heaven who is full of Heseḏ – full of mercy and compassion and lovingkindness*
- **His eye is upon you – He sees your tears – and His heart is full of mercy and kindness and compassion for you – and He will show kindness to you when you cry out to Him for help**
  
- If you are not like a Naomi or a Ruth – then you can be a Boaz to someone
- **You can be a godly person of noble character who reflects the Father's heart for the vulnerable**
- *You can be the instrument through whom God shows kindness to a vulnerable person in distress*
- And you never know what grand purpose your act of kindness might serve in someone's life and in God's Kingdom
  
- *Will you join God in showing Kindness to the Vulnerable?*

### Prayer

*"He Knows My Name"*