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Advent / Ruth 3-4

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This morning we read parts of Ruth 3 & 4 as we journey through the book of Ruth this advent. The first week of advent, the week of Hope, Naomi was returning to Bethlehem with her daughter-in-law, Ruth, after losing her husband and two sons. Naomi was in a dark place. When she left Bethlehem ten years ago she was full of hope, and now in returning, she felt broken. She didn't realize that God had good plans. His promises and accomplished will aren't deterred by our inability to see or walk in his will. Ruth portrays an outsider welcomed in to become family, pointing to the invitation extended to gentiles. Ruth's willingness to follow places her where God wanted to protect, provide, and bless. Her kindness is met with kindness. Naomi didn't know God was working to bring good out of her situation. And yet God was there working all the time. She couldn't see it. The barley harvest was just beginning, a sign of the grace of God and new beginnings. After bleak moments in what begins the book of Ruth, we started to see a hint of light. There is hope; a sense that things are going to get better for Ruth and Naomi.

The next week we saw how Naomi and Ruth arrive in Bethlehem as poor widows. Ruth and Naomi arrived in

Bethlehem with no food, no security, and no idea how they would survive. As Ruth stepped out to glean in the fields, she did so with no guaranteed outcome—just trust that God would somehow make a way. But Scripture tells us that Ruth “happened” to end up in the field of Boaz (Ruth 2:3), though nothing about that moment was accidental. God had already gone ahead of her. Boaz was already in place. Favor was already prepared. Provision was already on the way. Boaz, it is another sign that God was leading. God provides food for Ruth and someone to redeem her from an uncertain future. This is unexpected for Ruth. And if you are waiting for God’s provision, consider this: He may be inviting you to take a humble first step, trusting that He will guide the rest. We are reminded that God’s peace often comes wrapped in His provision. Sometimes it arrives as grain in a field or bread on a table; other times it appears through a kind word, a generous act, or the compassion of a stranger at just the right moment. But Christmas shows us this truth in its fullest form: God’s peace came to us as a Person—Jesus—sent into the world to meet our deepest need.

This week’s Advent theme is love. In Ruth, we see love expressed in courage, integrity, and sacrifice—pointing us forward to the greatest expression of love in Jesus at Christmas. I want to weave together some of Ruth 3 and 4 with this week’s theme of love, setting the stage for what

we'll explore on Christmas Eve. In our story, we've reached a moment where Naomi realizes that unless Ruth marries, their future will remain uncertain and difficult. So when Naomi learns that Boaz has shown great kindness to Ruth in the fields—and that he is one of their *family redeemers*—a spark of hope returns.

A family redeemer was a close relative who could choose to step in and care for the extended family. According to the law, when a woman's husband died, she could marry his brother. But Naomi had no more sons. In those situations, the nearest male relative could step in as a family redeemer and marry the widow. He wasn't required to do so; he could decline, in which case the responsibility passed to the next relative. If no one chose to help, the widow faced a lifetime of poverty, because inheritance passed through men, not wives. To soften these realities, God provided laws for gleaning and for family redemption—ways to protect the vulnerable.

The threshing floor was the place where harvested wheat was separated from its chaff. It was usually on a high spot outside the village where the wind could help with winnowing. Boaz stayed there overnight both to guard the grain and to wait for his turn to thresh, since harvesting filled the daylight hours.

At Naomi's prompting, Ruth approaches Boaz at the end of a long day, after he has eaten and settled in for the night,

and lies at his feet. The details of the encounter carry some ambiguity, but what is clear is that Ruth's actions involved significant risk. When Naomi instructed Ruth to uncover Boaz's feet and lie down, she was telling Ruth to follow Israelite custom. This gesture signaled to Boaz that he *could* be her family redeemer—that he could seek someone to marry her, or choose to marry her himself.

To spread the corner of one's garment over a woman was a symbolic pledge of marriage—a practice that, in some areas of the Middle East, continues today. Ruth begins by identifying herself, and then courageously asks Boaz to act as her kinsman-redeemer by covering her with his garment, signaling the promise and protection of marriage. In doing so, she places herself in an incredibly vulnerable position, unsure of how Boaz might respond.

At this point, it was simply family duty, not romance. Boaz could have misunderstood her, rejected her, or publicly shamed her. Instead, he responds with kindness and honour.

The moment Boaz understood what Ruth was asking, the story takes a beautiful turn. He is deeply moved, realizing that Ruth could have pursued any younger or wealthier man instead of honoring their customs. He tells her in Ruth 3:10 “May you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter; this last instance of your loyalty is better than the first; you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich.”

From that moment forward, their relationship grows into a love marked by humility, generosity, and mutual respect—the kind of love Advent invites us to reflect on and embody.

In this moment, we see Naomi and Ruth refusing to accept the limitations and injustices their society placed on vulnerable women. They take courageous steps toward a future that seemed closed to them.

This raises an important question for us today: Who are the people in our society who quietly surrender their place because the system feels stacked against them? And in what ways—whether knowingly or unknowingly—might we contribute to the injustices they face?

As a foreigner Ruth may have thought that Naomi’s advice was odd, but she followed it because she knew Naomi was kind, trustworthy, and filled with integrity. She also knew how godly and kind Boaz was from the first day she met him. She had witnessed his love for the Lord, his obedience to God’s law, his kindness, his respect toward women, his empathy for the poor, and his generosity.

That scene matters because it captures something essential about faith: that God often works through moments where someone dares to trust, and someone else chooses to be faithful. The heart of this passage is found in highlighting the love and courage shown by those considered “the least”—people who choose faithfulness to

God and take brave, self-giving action even when the cultural forces around them work against them. It is also a story about cross-cultural resilience, adaptation, and survival in the midst of deep ideological, racial, and religious tensions—realities that still echo in our world three thousand years later.

As we enter chapter four, we witness the redemption of Ruth and Naomi. Here the true cost of this redemption becomes clear. It required significant sacrifice from Boaz—a fact highlighted by the response of the nearer kinsman-redeemer, who backed away once he understood what the responsibility would demand.

Boaz begins by bringing up the land, saying nothing yet about Ruth. He's being strategic—because the land isn't the real issue. Boaz wants to marry Ruth, but he must first make it clear before the elders that if the nearer kinsman refuses his duty, Boaz is ready to step in. So he mentions the land first, and the nearer relative quickly agrees: "I will redeem it."

Then Boaz reveals the fuller picture. When Naomi's husband died, the property would have passed to her sons, and Ruth—having been married to one of them—was part of that inheritance. So to redeem the land properly, the man must also take Ruth as his wife. Boaz emphasizes her identity as "Ruth the Moabitess," highlighting that she comes from Moab—a nation Israel despised. Suddenly the

man hesitates. Marrying a Moabite woman is a very different matter.

Beyond that, the financial risk is enormous. If Ruth bears a son, that child would inherit on Naomi's family line. And if anything happened to the man's own sons, his entire estate could shift to Naomi's family. The cost is too high. He backs out, saying, "You redeem it yourself. I cannot."

How often do we see this same pattern today, where it is the overlooked, the vulnerable, and the oppressed whose persistence, love, and determination carve out a place at a table that was never set for them?

Redemption is costly—so costly that the nearer kinsman refused to pay the price. But Boaz loved Ruth, and he was willing to take on the sacrifice. The book of Ruth is, at its heart, a love story: the story of a kinsman-redeemer who rescued his beloved from a desperate situation at great personal cost.

Moments of vulnerability reveal the true character of those who stand before us. Ruth placed herself at Boaz's feet with nothing to protect her but her hope in his integrity. And Boaz's response—gentle, honourable, protective—changed the course of her life. History is filled with similar moments where someone risks opening their heart, not knowing how the other person will respond. One such moment occurred in the life of Charles Spurgeon.

Before Charles Spurgeon became one of the most influential preachers in history, he first met Susannah Thompson in 1853, a young woman who struggled deeply with insecurity, shyness, and a sense of unworthiness. Though she would later become a strong ministry partner, at that stage she felt spiritually inadequate and socially out of place—very much like Ruth, a foreigner entering unfamiliar territory.

One evening, after attending one of his sermons, Susannah confessed to Charles that she did not feel “worthy” of God’s love or capable of growing in faith. She later wrote that she felt exposed, unsure, and overwhelmed—as if she were laying her heart at someone’s feet.

Spurgeon responded with remarkable gentleness and integrity. He did not dismiss her fears or take advantage of her vulnerability. Instead, he walked her into the Metropolitan Tabernacle library, gave her a copy of John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress*, and said:

“This book, if you read it with a willing heart, will guide your steps into the love of Christ.”

That act became the turning point of her spiritual life. She later wrote:

“That hour was the doorway of hope to me.”

Eventually they married, but what shaped Susie most

wasn't romance—it was that in her moment of vulnerability, Charles acted with kindness, protection, and redemptive care.

This story echoes Ruth's nighttime encounter with Boaz:

- Ruth placed herself in a vulnerable position at Boaz's feet.  
Susannah opened her heart in insecurity and fear.
- Boaz responded with integrity, compassion, and protection, not exploitation.  
Spurgeon responded with pastoral gentleness, helping her toward spiritual wholeness.
- The meeting became a turning point toward redemption in Ruth's story.  
Susannah later said that moment “set her feet on the path of faith.”

It illustrates how godly people respond when others trust them with their vulnerability—and how God uses those moments to bring redemption, healing, and hope.

Ruth's story, like Susannah's, reminds us that God often works through the kindness of those who choose love over advantage, and integrity over self-interest.

Together, Naomi and Ruth become a powerful picture of self-giving, other-centered love—standing in stark contrast to how their culture viewed them. Husbandless,

vulnerable, and seen as outsiders who threatened the purity of Israel's patriarchal bloodlines, they embodied everything society dismissed. Yet it is precisely this kind of unselfish love that foreshadows the coming of the Son of God—Love Himself—who entered the world unnoticed and was rejected by His own for many of the same reasons.

Ruth is included in a genealogy mainly defined by men—a lineage that ultimately leads to the coming of the Incarnate One—because of her love. Her choices give us an opportunity to reflect on what truly makes Christians family to one another. It is not shared culture, race, custom, or law; rather, it is the way these things are transformed and illuminated by love. This is the kind of love that calls us to risk our reputation, our security, and even tension within our own families in order to lay down our lives for the One we love—Jesus Christ. And Christ is made most visible in those around us whom we are least likely to notice... or, at times, most tempted to disregard.

The Christmas story is also a love story—one of a Kinsman-Redeemer who rescued His beloved at great cost. Ruth trusted a faithful redeemer, Susannah trusted a faithful guide, and we are called to trust our ultimate Redeemer—Jesus—whose love cost Him everything to bring us home. There is a hymn that says, “He paid a debt he did not owe; I owed a debt I could not pay; I needed someone to wash my sins away. And now I sing a brand-new song: “Amazing

grace!” Christ Jesus paid the debt that we could never pay.” Christmas is the story of a kinsman-redeemer who redeemed his beloved from a desperate situation at great cost to himself. Christ Jesus paid the debt that we could never pay.

We were trapped in sin, cut off from God, and unable to save ourselves. Our need was urgent—we needed a Redeemer. So, how did God respond? Galatians 4:4–5 “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children.” This is Christmas: God sent Jesus into our world, taking on our flesh. He became our kin—closer than a brother—so that He could redeem us.

And like Boaz, Jesus’ redemption came at a great price. Mark 10:45 “For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many.”

The nearer relative in Ruth feared losing his estate. Jesus willingly left His. He laid aside heaven’s glory, entered our world, faced rejection, and gave His own life to ransom us.

This is the heart of Christmas: a Redeemer who loved us enough to pay the full cost of bringing us home.

Ruth placed herself at the feet of Boaz and he met her vulnerability with protection, gentleness, and redemptive care. Boaz rose to meet that trust with faithfulness. That is the turning point for Ruth—and it becomes the turning

point for us as well. Because each of us must decide whether we will bring our own vulnerability—our fears, our doubts, our wounds, our need for help—our future, and our identity—to the feet of the One who is greater than Boaz. And we must also decide whether we will respond like Boaz—people whose integrity, compassion, and righteousness make others safer, stronger, and more whole.

The Book of Ruth invites us to trust courageously, love faithfully, and embrace our own vulnerability as part of that trust. As we prepare to celebrate the birth of Jesus, how will we reflect this love, the love shown through Ruth, the love shown through Boaz, and especially the love shown to us through Jesus? How will we reflect this love in our families, in our communities, and in the lives of those who are overlooked or vulnerable? Will we trust the Redeemer who came to us, and will we show that love to others?