

Ruth and Boaz Marry

Life is a journey of choices. You cannot control what life places before you every day, but you can



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decide if you will trust God, live morally and make a difference for others.

The book called “Ruth” is a story of human choices and God’s grace. Naomi and her husband chose to go to Moab in a time of famine. Ruth chose to marry a foreigner. When Elimelech and his sons died, Ruth chose to go to Judea with her mother-in-law out of love, with no guarantee that life would be better. Boaz chose to care for Naomi and Ruth and became the “kinsman redeemer” for Ruth. None of this progression was predictable or easy, but the results are beautiful for those individuals and for us.

Our story begins with Boaz sitting at the city gate, waiting for the “nearer kinsman” to come by. The city gate was the point at which everyone entered and left Bethlehem as well as where business was transacted. The elders, a quorum of ten men, served as judges and the legal body that verified and ruled on disputes and contracts.

The negotiations that day involved the division of Elimelech’s land as well as the wife connected to that land. Don’t forget the “levirate marriage” issue that provided a way for the family lineage to be continued through Ruth. Boaz lays out the possibility of the nearer kinsman to buy the land combined with accepting Ruth as his wife. Boaz clearly states: “The day you acquire the field from Naomi you are also acquiring Ruth the Moabite” (v. 5).

Try not to view the nearer kinsman as the bad guy. We know nothing of his family. Like Boaz, he is a landowner and business man who most likely has a family and is simply considering a land

acquisition. Legally Boaz must present this offer and work out a legal settlement. Verse 7 describes the act of redemption observed with the sale of land: “A man removed his sandal and gave it to another, and this was the manner of attestation in Israel.” Boaz immediately announced his intention to buy the land and marry Ruth “to maintain the dead man’s name on his inheritance, in order that the name of the dead may not be cut off from his kindred and the gate of his native place” (v. 10). What seems an odd public spectacle to us is a beautiful public declaration of both family responsibility and love.

The people, along with the elders, bless the decision made at the gate of Bethlehem: “We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your house like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you produce children in Ephrathah and become a name in Bethlehem; and, through the children that the Lord will give you by this young woman, may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah” (vv. 11-12).

Rachel and Leah were the daughters of Laban who married Jacob and whose children became the twelve tribes of Israel (Genesis 35:23-26). Perez was the son of Tamar, and ancestor of Boaz (Gen.38). We sometimes wonder how genuine love ever had a chance in societies where men made all the decisions and the women held tempting dowries of land or money. Ruth is a story in which two women chose to act circumspectly, with both love and honor ... a story in which a wealthy man chose to act out of love and integrity to marry the woman he loved. Do you wonder if this story would have been included in the Bible if Ruth had not been the great-grandmother of King David and the ancestor of Jesus?

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This “romantic” book reminds us that God works through real people in a less than perfect world. The way of faith is found in trusting God in complex circumstances and seeking to honor him in your decisions. What if Boaz had cared more about his property and income than becoming involved with those two needy women? What if Naomi or Ruth had looked for the easiest or most gullible man to snare? The business of land ownership and levirate marriage were complex legal challenges. Prejudice against foreigners was common. Cultural barriers were formidable. Times were hard for most people. But Naomi was both moral and shrewd. Ruth chose to leave her homeland because she saw a difference in her first husband and his family that offered a new kind of life.

The love story of Ruth is played out in the love of God who is about healing the broken, reshaping the human heart through grace and offering the lost world a new way to live. You live in a less than perfect world, but your values, attitudes and actions can offer people hope and grace. Every day and its opportunities present possibilities for you to share God’s love and model hope against the turmoil of this life.

We all make choices. Where and how will you get involved in something that offers a sense of fulfillment instead of personal gain or standing? You may know a Naomi who has lost much and needs friendship and encouragement. You may know a Ruth who has lost family and a sense of belonging. Life takes meaning from the choices you make and the love of God that shapes you. Like Ruth, we all have a story. May your story be shaped by God’s love within you and as it plays out in your actions.

Retired after almost 50 years in pastoral ministry, Michael K. Olmsted enjoys family, supply preaching and interim work, literature, history, the arts and antiques. Formations is a curriculum series from Smyth & Helwys Publishing, Inc. through NextSunday Resources.