

A classic case of cold feet. A sermon on the book of Ruth, preached on June 19, 2016 at St. Giles' Presbyterian Church, Prince George, BC by Rev. Herb Hilder.

Scriptures: RUTH 3
EPHESIANS 3:11-19

It is one of the most intriguing (and also comical – when you think about it) scenes in the Bible.

Boaz – a buttoned down man of impeccable character – awakens in the middle of the night to discover a woman at his feet.

'Startled' is probably an understatement.

I wonder – what did his facial expressions convey.

The storyteller has fast forwarded about 7 weeks through both the barley and the wheat harvest.

It is now time for the grain to be winnowed.

After this year's harvest,

Boaz's quarterly reports are looking good.

His accounts – very healthy.

All season long, he has done everything according to the book

The threshing floor where he is sleeping is now reaped with piles of winnowed grain – evidence indeed of a successful crop,

lots of hard work

And of God's lavish provision.

Boaz has feasted with his workers and is now sleeping peacefully on the threshing floor. And then this.

The silhouette in the darkness of a woman standing next to him

Boaz whispers hoarsely in the darkness **who are you? (3:9)**

I wonder is Ruth being forward and about to do something sexually inappropriate
I wonder, is Ruth trying to seduce Boaz.

We might think so if this were a scene from a pot boiling Harlequin Romance bit of fluff. Or if it were a take from Desperate Housewives.

But it is neither.

It is a scene from the Book of Ruth.

And if we have learned nothing else,

We have already seen clearly that the Book of Ruth is much more than a simple romance.

This scene is much much more than a predictable account of a bit of hanky panky on the threshing room floor.

In terms of the story line, chapter 3 fills in some important contextual gaps and beautifully sets the stage for the final chapter.

What remains a real concern for Naomi is starvation and abandonment.

She is an older widow in a society that does not treat widows well or supportively.

Naomi knows that her very future existence depends upon Ruth marrying well.

So, how can Naomi ensure this – get Ruth and Boaz together....

The plan Naomi devises is quite simple – though extremely risky to Ruth’s person and reputation if the plan backfires.

Naomi begins by identifying Boaz as the prospective groom.

Boaz is a known entity – Ruth has been working in his fields for several weeks now.

Boaz has already demonstrated hesed to care about Ruth (3:2)

Master strategist that she is – Naomi has also figured out the perfect time and place for a private conversation with Boaz that will not compromise either Ruth or Boaz if the plan goes sideways.

Ruth, get fancied up – bathe, put on perfume and put on that nice set of clothes you don’t wear very much

I wonder is Naomi dressing Ruth as a bride to ensure that Boaz gets the point – for after all; men are not always the sharpest tool in the box.

Ruth, you are to go, to the threshing floor under cover of darkness,

Wait until Boaz finishes feasting, and note carefully where he lies down for the night

Then a final instruction, **Ruth, go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do(3:4)**

How will Boaz respond?
We do not have to wait long.

What is interesting is that the moment Boaz wakes, Ruth changes Naomi’s plan

Ruth is not about to wait for Boaz to react, rather she identifies herself and then requests

I am Ruth, your servant; spread your cloak over your servant, for you are next of kin (3:9)

It is in essence a proposal of marriage from Ruth to Boaz

Further, Ruth confronts Boaz with his legal responsibilities as a near relative of Ruth’s dead father in law, Elimelech.

What could have been a private transaction between two people and a consummated marriage – which Naomi’s plan expected – now becomes a public legal matter tied up with the laws of inheritance and kin and family.

For there are closer to Elimelech relations in the picture. It will mean that if Boaz really wants to marry Ruth, it will mean going public as it were....

That’s the story line in Ruth.

What does the story of Boaz and Ruth on the threshing room floor say to us?

It is a no nonsense reminder that to live as God’s people, to follow the risen Christ means that each of us will be perpetually confronted with difficult situations and hard choices to compromise the ways of God.

Being a believer does not remove you from such things.

Will it be God’s way or the world’s?

Will it be the voices of reminding us of the ways of Jesus or the siren voices of the world that we will listen to?

Will we be able to gratify self-gratification for something more?

Ruth – probably no toad.

Boaz – certainly older than Ruth, but probably not some paunchy old goat with bad teeth and too much ear hair

Story makes it clear they are attracted to one another.

Not to be prurient, but the drama on the threshing room floor could easily have gone off plan that night – with no long term commitment from Boaz. There is though no evidence that anything untoward happened.

Why? As Naomi suspected, Boaz was a man of virtue

Ruth was an honorable woman

(And let's not be all prissy and sanctimonious)

Both Ruth and Boaz were able to make their family's needs trump any selfish desire or self interest

The long view was more important than short term satisfaction.

The temptations Ruth and Boaz faced were very real – make no mistake about it.

But they were not prepared to give into them.

For both of them, it was not their bodily and emotional needs that were important.

Others – in this case Naomi – were central and must remain so for the time being.

Our world will constantly chirp at us messages that are counter to the ways of Jesus and God.

You deserve it; you owe it to yourself; why wait?

Listen to advertisers as they try and convince us to buy more stuff that we really do not need

Or that somehow are supposed to give our lives meaning and purpose.

And in the area of sexual temptation, and our world is awash in sexuality, we are it seems constantly facing difficult situations and hard choices aren't we?

And if you feel yourself beyond that – probably your children and grandchildren know the reality of difficult situations and hard choices all too well.

This particular episode of the Book of Ruth also underlines and shows the *power of hesed in the lives of three people*.

Hesed displayed that has earned Naomi, Ruth and Boaz a treasured and special place in the scriptures and in the lives of faithful people who for centuries have drawn inspiration, encouragement and hope from their story.

Hesed – this 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 kind of living.

An active, selfless, sacrificial caring for one another that goes against the grain of our fallen natures!

Hesed is driven neither by duty nor some sort of legal obligation, but by a deep commitment – a loyal, selfless love that motivates a person to do voluntarily, willingly, what no one has a right to ask or expect of them.

They willingly pour themselves out for the good of someone else.

It’s actually the kind of love we find most fully expressed in Jesus.

Hesed then is the gospel lived out!

As we have already seen, the narrator of Ruth’s story does not bog down with definitions of *hesed*.

Instead,

He provides colourful pictures of what *hesed* looks like in peoples’ lives

Most appropriate – for *hesed* is something you DO, more than something you think or feel.

Here in chapter 3, nothing untoward happens on the threshing room floor between Boaz and Ruth because it just does not enter their minds. And it does not enter their minds because they are not thinking of their own needs or drives, but of Naomi’s long term safety and security.

It’s not about them and their needs – it is about somebody else.

Nothing must compromise, complicate or muddy that concern – for Naomi.

Hesed – God’s unfailing love, kindness, mercy, faithfulness, loyalty and goodness shown to each of us, which we in turn we are to show to all others.

It is crucial

Without it, a believer becomes an empty shell; spiritually, full of pious talk, but not much more.

Without it in a community of faith the community will begin to die spiritually.

If no corrective action is taken, a community of faith will become an historical statistic

This particular episode from the Book of Ruth is also a *timely reminder on how men should treat women*.

Timely because of the recent court case in Stamford Connecticut where swimmer student, Brock Turner was only given six months for raping a co-ed.

Turner sadly is only the most recent in an all too long line of young men who just don’t get it. Men cannot do whatever they please to a woman’s body without some degree of accountability.

As one social media posting said, “She (the victim) will endure the unthinkable trauma of his ‘20 minutes of action’ for the duration of her lifetime.”

I don’t know whether Brock Turner or the judge that sentenced him are Christians,--if so then double shame on them.

How long O Lord before the punishment fits the crime – I believe 6 months is just not long enough.

Little wonder then when I came to reflect on his part of Ruth's story, this is indeed a proper relationship between man and woman

A man of power and a woman who has no worldly power – in which there is no hidden agenda, or end run or eye on the main chance.

Right from the get go – Boaz treats Ruth with respect doesn't he

Boaz could have taken advantage of Ruth at any time – he is powerful, Ruth is just a foreigner.

Yet, Boaz remains a man of virtue, purity and integrity.

At no point does he say, do or act in a way that compromises either Ruth or him.

Boaz is able to do this, because he never loses his respect for Ruth.

His treatment of her is one based on *hesed*

Boaz is committed to do the right thing the right way.

I still believe that men are to be the moral leaders in any relationship.

It is up to us guys, to take the moral high ground,

Protecting the purity and reputation of those women with whom we associate.

I think that's what manhood is in part all about.

It's not about conquests of women!!! Or meeting our needs!!!

Something that the Brock Turners of this world forget!!!

It is about challenging our fellow believers to take the high ground and to do the hard things which God requires of us through the power of His Spirit.

For as God's people confronted with difficult situations and hard choices we will certainly continue to be...

AMEN