

Dear Friends,

#### CORRECTION:

Thank you to Fran Shepherd from St Luke's in Rochester for pointing out the mistake in last time's piece. The command from Leviticus should have read "And your vineyard you shall not pluck bare." Not, "And your vineyard you shall not pluck bear." Unfortunately, the Bible does not contain instructions on what to do if you have bears in your vineyard. Attempting to pluck them would probably not be wise and would be best avoided.

#### RUTH 2: 3-7

Naomi and Ruth have arrived in Bethlehem. Ruth is going to provide them with food. She will do this by gleaning, collecting the leftover crops that get left behind by the harvesters.

It happened that Ruth came to some land belonging to Boaz. The name Boaz suggests strength. The story teller says that she came to this particular place by chance. I wonder if they also feel that God's hand is behind it; that God led Ruth to just this very field.

Ruth works out who is in charge. The land owner is not there, but there's a kind of foreman. Ruth asks for permission to glean. The foreman knows who she is. Perhaps she has already been pointed out to him or maybe he questions her before giving her the go ahead. He watches her and admires her strength and commitment to the task. She works hard at the back breaking work. She barely takes a rest.

At this point in the Authorised Version of the Bible we get a "Behold". We don't use that word much these days so it doesn't tend to appear in our modern translations. In a way it's a pity, because the Hebrew word is used to draw our attention to a change in the perspective. "Behold" is the kind of word that stands out, so it serves that purpose well. The change in perspective takes us from a wide shot which shows us the whole scene from a distance to a close up where we are right in the middle of the action seeing events from the point of view of one of the characters. It says "Behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem." We can imagine seeing the scene from Ruth's eyes. She looks up from her work for a moment and sees someone arrive. He's clearly important. He speaks his first words in the story. To the reapers he says, "May the Lord be with you!" They reply, "The Lord bless you." That is a good sign. He gives his blessing to people. God is in his heart and mind. Those who are working for him appear to respect and appreciate him. I like to think that the eyes of Ruth and Boaz meet across the field, if only for a moment. But maybe I've seen too many romantic comedies.

Boaz certainly notices Ruth. He asks the foreman, "To whom does this young woman belong?" Not, "Who is she?" Or, "What is her name?" But, "To whom does she belong?" Sorry Boaz, people are not property to belong to other people. It's interesting also to see that she is described as a "young woman." That's the word

used to describe a girl from infancy to adolescence. She has already been married to one of Naomi's sons, perhaps for as long ten years. So, she has most likely gone beyond those stages. I picture her as being in her twenties. She is the contemporary of the young men who are harvesting. Boaz is probably older. He knows that he can no longer be described as a young man.

In answer to Boaz's question the foreman defines Ruth twice by where she's from and also in relation to Naomi. He does not call her by her own name. He says, "She is the Moabite who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab."

Ruth has been hoping to find favour in the eyes of a land owner. The foreman gave her permission to glean. But now she is summoned to go and speak to the land owner himself. What thoughts pass through her mind? Perhaps she wonders, "Will he send me away, maybe simply because I am a foreigner? Or will he show me kindness?"

God bless you,

Tony