

Dear Friends,

RUTH 2: 8-13

Ruth has been gleaning, collecting a share of the leftover crops for herself and Naomi. She is brought to speak to Boaz the landowner. She is aware that as a Moabite, she might have to put up with some prejudice. Maybe Boaz is about to put up a sign on his field saying "No Moabites." Perhaps she's about to be sent away.

But no, the first words of Boaz were "The Lord be with you." He seems to recognise his responsibility to be a blessing, and not just to Israelites, but also to any others who come for shelter. He shows kindness and tenderness to Ruth. He calls her "My daughter." That suggests that he's older than her, maybe quite a lot older. He tells her not to glean in any other field and to "cling to" his young women. First, she clings to Naomi, now she clings to Boaz's servant girls.

He says that he has ordered the young men not to bother her. It's revealing that Boaz feels that he needs to give that instruction, as though otherwise she would have been considered fair game for sexual advances. You wonder also if he's not being entirely selfless. He may be trying to keep the young men away from her in the hope that she might see the potential of an older man, like him.

He tells her that if she gets thirsty, she may help herself to the water the men have drawn from the well. This is beginning to look familiar. There are a number of biblical stories about couples who meet at wells. Usually it's after one of them, normally the man, has been on a long journey. They are betrothal stories. Each story has the same elements, but with slight differences. So, Jacob meets Rachel, and Moses meets Zipporah at wells after long journeys. When Abraham sends his servant away to find a wife for his son, the servant knows to go to a well, as it is the biblical venue for speed dating. In our story the mention of the water that has been drawn from a well after Ruth's long journey makes us wonder if this could possibly be another betrothal scene.

Ruth, in response to Boaz's kindness, prostrates herself before him with her face to the ground. She acts in a very lowly way, taking an attitude that is usually reserved for kings or gods. She says, "Why should I find favour in your eyes that you should notice me an immigrant?" Ruth shows a lot of humility, but actually she has got what she wanted, what she set out to get. Her aim was to glean in the field of someone in whose eyes she found favour. In Boaz she has found exactly that. She is no object being acted upon by others. She takes initiative and is resourceful. She makes a plan and successfully gets it done. She has shaped her own destiny.

Boaz tells her that he has heard about her faithfulness to Naomi. She has left her father and mother and the land of her birth to come to a people that she did not know before. She is clearly meant to be seen as a new Abraham. He went from his land, his birthplace and his father's house to a land that God showed him. Abraham became the father of the nation. Perhaps Ruth could become one of the mothers of the nation. Although for her as a Moabite to become part of the Israelite line would

be unlikely and would be disapproved of by some. And where would she meet a descendant of Abraham, unless Boaz ...? Would that be too much of a coincidence?

Boaz prays that God will bless Ruth. "May your reward be complete from the Lord God of Israel under whose wings you have come to shelter."

While Boaz prays for God to show favour to her. Ruth turns it around with the polite suggestion that he, Boaz, is in a position to do something for her. He could be the answer to his own prayer. He said, "May God show you favour." She says, "May I continue to find favour in your eyes, my lord, for you have comforted me and have spoken to the heart of your servant when I could scarcely be like one of your slave girls."

They both return to their work. I imagine each, from time to time glancing in the other's direction, and then quickly looking away for fear of being noticed. I imagine each wondering what, if anything, will happen next.

God bless you,

Tony