

Dear Friends,

RUTH 3: 14-18

Ruth has spent the night lying with Boaz. He has agreed to marry her. There is however a closer relative to Naomi and Ruth. Before Boaz can give himself to Ruth that closer relative must be given the opportunity to take responsibility for her. Boaz has promised to take action in the morning. They spend the rest of the night together.

In the morning, Ruth gets up to make her way home while it is still dark enough to stop people from seeing who she is. This is at Boaz's guidance. He says, "It must not be known that the woman came to the threshing-floor." Both in the fields and at night he called her "my daughter." Now he seems to be putting some distance between himself and her by calling her "the woman." He is concerned for her reputation. At the moment her reputation is good. She does not need to lose the respect of the people of Bethlehem. He asks her to hold out her shawl. He fills it with barley. He then puts that on her shoulder or her head for her to carry home.

Ruth goes home. Naomi is waiting for her. I imagine she had an anxious night wondering how it was going between Ruth and Boaz. She says "How are you, my daughter?" Ruth tells her about all that the man had done for her. She perhaps draws a veil over her part in pretty much telling Boaz what to do. That wasn't part of Naomi's instructions. So, she keeps that to herself.

Ruth shows Naomi the barley that was given to her by Boaz. She tells Naomi that Boaz said "You should not come empty-handed to your mother-in-law." We did not hear him say that. But it is possible. Maybe Ruth remembers what Naomi said when she returned to Bethlehem. "I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty." Ruth has been urging Naomi to see that she is not empty. Ruth is with her and Ruth does not come empty-handed. We still have a chapter to go. But those are Ruth's last words in the story. Women have been at the centre of the events. They have been the driving force behind all that happens. They will return when things get wrapped up.

Naomi tells Ruth to "stay" until she learns how the matter turns out. This feels like a change of tune for Naomi. Her constant message to Ruth has been "go." She told Ruth to "go" or "go back" about five times while they were travelling back from Moab. She said "go" again when Ruth suggested that she would like to glean. Now at last, Naomi says "stay." They stay together. They wait while the men gather, make their deliberations and take their decisions. Naomi assures Ruth that Boaz will not rest until the matter is settled.

God bless you,

Tony