



GENEROUS HARVEST: PREACHING RUTH

Resources for Week Two

Introduction

GENEROUS HARVEST: PREACHING RUTH

Generous Harvest is a range of creative resources for Harvest-tide prepared by the diocese of Liverpool. The materials support [Bishop' John's invitation](#) to parishes to explore the challenge of generous discipleship around Harvest this autumn.

The resources can be found at the [Generous Harvest](#) page on the diocese of Liverpool website:

- Liturgies for Sunday worship - Eucharist and a Service of the Word - and daily prayer
- Creative prayer stations with full, illustrated guide
- Children and Young People's activities
- A generosity roundtable; an informal small group discussion with brief video input to start generosity conversations. It adapts a national resource, a Generosity Fika, inspired by a Swedish custom of meeting to talk over coffee and cake
- A congregational leaflet
- Guidance on an informal Harvest Supper themed around the story of Ruth

ABOUT GENEROSITY WEEK

The exploration of Ruth is a focus within the diocese of Liverpool and is intended to share in [Generosity Week](#), an initiative of the Church of England National Giving Team. Generous Harvest resources draw upon and complement the rich resources offered for Generosity Week and parishes are encouraged to explore those resources.

WEEK TWO: PREACHING RUTH

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ABOUT PREACHING RUTH

Part of the Generous Harvest resources, Preaching Ruth is a resource for preaching two sermons exploring generosity in the Book of Ruth over a Harvest octave. Resource materials offer a starting point for sermon preparation. Preachers will readily adapt, amend and develop the suggested themes with reference to the preaching culture of the local congregation. Although written for Harvest the material can readily be adapted for use in Ordinary Time throughout the year:

- A short introduction to generous discipleship in Ruth
- Background notes to the text, drawing on insights from the commentaries
- Sermon outlines, suggested content and structure for two sermons
- An abridged reading of the Book of Ruth

THE SERMON OUTLINES

The structure of the sermon outlines is traditional:

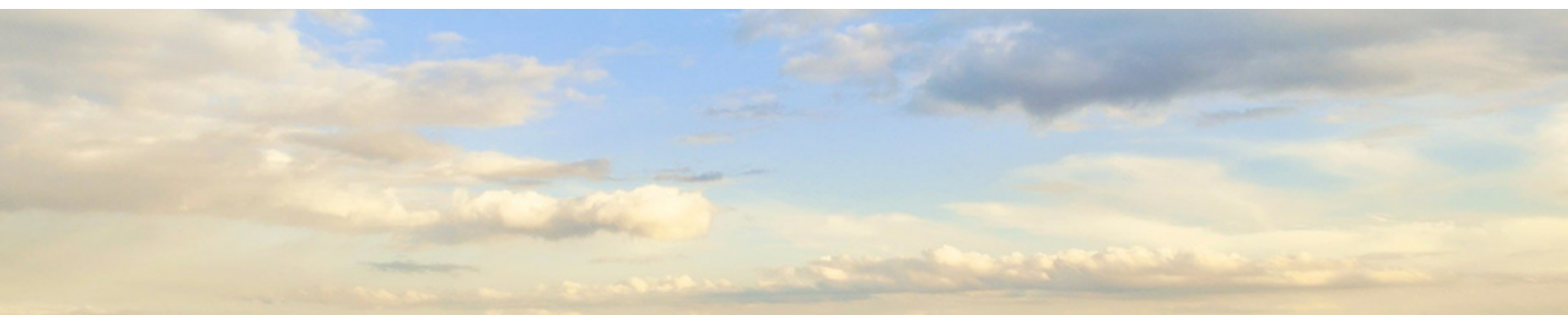
- An opening, illustrative story, best told 'live'; try to avoid a reading of the text.
- Insights into generous discipleship, exploring the Bible story through the lens of Naomi, Ruth and Boaz. For each character a single theme is drawn out. However, Ruth's story and the background notes suggest additional themes preachers may wish to develop.
- Generous discipleship today: a 'call to action'.



THE CALL TO ACTION

The sermon invites a response to the preaching of God's word for this congregation, from this passage, today. Specifically the call to action is framed around three invitations in our worshipping communities:

- To review our giving to our church, sustaining ministry and as a personal spiritual discipline.
- To join the Parish Giving Scheme, the most effective and efficient way to give generously.
- To consider leaving a legacy to our church, a gift of life for the life of our church.



The book of Ruth weaves together two stories, divine and human. Both are stories of contrast and conclusion. The first story is the arc of God's purpose for Israel. It begins in the chaotic time of the Judges (1:1; Judges 21:25) and with a contradiction: no bread in Bethlehem, the House of Bread.

The second human story is framed by money matters. Ruth is not about money and possessions but the lives of Naomi, Ruth and Boaz are inevitably shaped by money. The poverty of two widows contrasts with Boaz, 'a man of wealth and standing' (2:1), making all the more remarkable Boaz' statement in 3:11, as the sermon notes indicate. Financial inheritance dictates the self-serving response of Naomi's closest relative (4:2-6).

The first, divine story comes to conclusion through the actions of a generous God who feeds his people (1:6) and gifts a child to Ruth (4:13). His presence is affirmed both in blessing (1:9; 2:4, 12, 20; 3:10; 4:14) and as the root of Naomi's hurt (1:13; 20-21). The second, human story comes to conclusion by God inspired generosity: the generous relationship of Ruth and Naomi; the generous giving of Boaz.

HOPE BORN OF GENEROSITY

All human life is here. The themes of famine, refugees, faith-challenging grief, poverty and vulnerability by gender are readily recognisable today. In different ways we each know something of scarcity and anxiety in a cost of living crisis and rising interest rates. In different ways we each know something of the challenge to generosity from what God has entrusted to us. Ruth is not a story of saints untouched by trouble. God's purpose is as hidden as it is real.

But Ruth is a story of hope. Out of Naomi's pain, Ruth's loving kindness and Boaz's generous integrity come healing and wholeness, home and happiness. From the faithfulness of today is born a legacy for tomorrow. A King is gifted to God's people (4:17); a blessing to Israel and, in Jesus, to the world. [1]

HARVEST OF ABUNDANCE

We read Ruth at Harvest-tide, as Jewish tradition does, for the story is set at the start of the barley harvest (1:22).[2] Harvest frames the laws of gleaning (chapter 2) and was the time to bring First Fruits and Tithes (not specifically mentioned) to provide for poor and priest. The 'kinsman-redeemer' ensures that land and lineage are not lost. With other laws it ensures poverty is not generational. [3]

[1] *The Bible does not duck the ambiguity: Kingship is blessing but also burden (1 Kings 12)*

[2] *Ruth is one of the five Megilloth or 'small scrolls' in the Hebrew Bible, along with Esther, Song of Songs, Ecclesiastes and Lamentations. The barley harvest usually begins around the time of Passover and so Jewish tradition has interpreted Naomi and Ruth arriving in Bethlehem (1:22) as Passover is held and the story ending with the Pentecost harvest celebration, once the barley and wheat harvests are completed (2:23). Reading Ruth between these two festivals recalls the Exodus journey through desert times to fulfilment of God's covenant promises (Deut. 16:9-12).*

LIVING THE LIFE OF FAITH

The Book of Ruth is just 85 verses long. Some 54 of those verses are people speaking to each other. God does not speak and in only two verses does God act (1:6; 4:13). But God is not silent. God speaks through Naomi. Broken by loss, unafraid to name and blame God for the bitterness of life (1:20-21) Naomi blesses others by the God who has turned his hand against her (1:8; 2:20). God speaks through Boaz who takes his faith to work (2:4) and extends growing generosity to Ruth in the gleaning fields, at the threshing floor and at the city gates. God speaks in Ruth's extraordinary kindness to Naomi and in the bold agency of her gleaning and marriage proposal, despite constraints of poverty, gender and outsider status. God speaks and works his purpose in and through faithful discipleship.

[3] *Ruth and Naomi are sustained by generosity. The gleaning and tithing laws sat alongside laws that forbade interest, regulated debt collection, cancelled debts, released economic slaves, proclaimed Jubilee. These laws were given to redeem and restore the gift of a promised land to all of God people, not only the wealthy.*

GENEROUS DISCIPLESHIP

Every day our lives bump up against the realities of money and possessions, for good and ill. So it's no surprise that Ruth offers much to learn about generous discipleship.[1] We are challenged to give generously from Boaz. We are challenged to live generously by Naomi and Ruth. Generosity is certainly about money. But if it is only ever about money generosity risks becoming transactional. We give to make a difference, to change a situation, to support our church. These things matter; very much so. But the generous discipleship of Naomi, Ruth and Boaz, in their different ways, is transformational. For generous giving is rooted in generous character. Generosity is who we are, not just what we give. 'If I give all I possess to the poor ... but do not have love, I gain nothing' (1 Cor 13:3). More than that, generosity is the very heart of God who gifted a promise to Israel and gives us all things in Christ.

KEY THEMES IN RUTH

Ruth is often said to be a love story between Ruth and Boaz. Perhaps. But that's not the heart of the story. An overly romantic reading misses some key themes.

- **Naomi is important.** The loss of her 'two lads' (1:5) the 'lad' Obed (4:16) frame the story. Her bitter loss is the focus of chapter 1. Her prayer (1:9) becomes action in 3:1-5.
- **This is a story of two women.** Naomi, Ruth (and Orpah) act decisively, make choices, take initiative. Ruth 'clings' to Naomi in 1:14 (use do marriage in Gen 2:4) and loves Naomi (4:15).
- **Ruth's love is expressed by the rich biblical word *hesed*** (1:8; 2:20; 3:20). "This is a covenant term, wrapping up in itself all the positive attributes of God: love, covenant faithfulness, mercy, grace, kindness, loyalty; in short acts of devotion and loving kindness arising from the heart that go beyond the requirements of duty or law." [1] *Hesed* is what God shows to Israel and expects of his people. It is shown by an impoverished Moabite widow.
- **This is a story of a community.** The towns-women welcome Naomi home, celebrate Obed's birth, name the child. The men praise Ruth and Boaz at the city gates. Boaz is Naomi's kinsman-redeemer (*gō'ēl*). He has responsibility for the economic (Lev. 25:25-30 & 47-55) and judicial well-being of clan members (Num. 35:9-27). Harvest is a shared celebration; a node in a network of laws seeking to restore the gift of God to the whole community.



[1] 'Even when the literature has other agendas, biblical faith cannot and does not avoid the defining power of economics for all life'. Walter Brueggemann: *Money and Possessions in the Bible* page 164.

[2] Ruth: *Exegetical Commentary on the Old Testament* (2015), Zondervan p. 50.

Week Two: Sermon Outline for Ruth

OLD TESTAMENT

Ruth 3:1-15; 4:2-6; 9-10; 13-17

EPISTLE

2 Corinthians 9:12-15 or 1 Tim 6:17-19

GOSPEL READING

Luke 19:1-10



A POSSIBLE SERMON OUTLINE

The following sermon outline is offered as a starting point for preachers:

1. **The 57 Cents:** A suggested story of contagious generosity
2. **Naomi:** the blessings of generosity
3. **Ruth:** the gift of sacrificial generosity
4. **Boaz:** set free by generosity sets us free
5. **Generous discipleship today:** three asks, three actions

SETTING THE SCENE

We are continuing to look at generous discipleship in the Book of Ruth. Today's reading begins with the intimacy of a marriage proposal by night and ends at the city gates in the heat of the day. Generous discipleship is about our inner life and the personal decisions we make and the integrity of generosity in our life with others.

We see that in our Gospel reading from Zacchaeus. When we he met Jesus and his life was changed he started his new journey of generosity and two things happened. First Zacchaeus made the decision to be generous, giving away half of his personal wealth. Second, he made the decision to act with integrity, repaying those he had defrauded as a tax collector.

1. THE STORY OF THE 57 CENTS

The moving and true story of Hattie May Wyatt and her gift of 57 Cents is found in appendix two. It is a story of 'contagious generosity' that blessed the congregation and community and bequeathed a legacy of generosity.



2. NAOMI: THE BLESSING OF GENEROSITY

Last week we left Naomi, silenced by her enormous loss but also able to receive Ruth's love and care which enabled her to generously wish for Ruth what she herself had lost (1:8-9). This week, something is different. Naomi speaks. She has a purpose and a plan. She acts, promptly and decisively.

The difference is generosity. Ruth's generous love helped heal Naomi's heart. The generous provision of the laws of gleaning ensured Naomi had enough to eat. The generosity of Boaz went beyond what the law required to the generosity that love requires. The generous welcome and joy of the townswomen ensured Naomi had a community to belong to.

Naomi has received the generous love of others. Now she acts generously. Because the lovely thing is that Naomi's purpose and plan is not for herself but for Ruth. Today we would say that Naomi wishes for Ruth both home and happiness (3:1).

- *I must find a home, or a 'resting place' for you*
- *That it may be well for you – it's a form of blessing.*

Remember, Naomi prayed these things for Ruth on the tear stained road to Judah in 1:8. Naomi now acts to secure that home and happiness, the answer to her own prayer.

The point here is that generosity, like Hattie May Wyatt's story is contagious. Naomi's story teaches us that the generosity we receive grows generosity of heart and hand in our lives. Generosity grows generosity. And generosity brings blessing back to us.



Naomi's plan with Ruth is a proposal of marriage to Boaz, their kinsman-redeemer. Sure enough, Ruth pops the question. Sure enough, Boaz says yes and promises to make it happen. The two women have confidence in Boaz, not least because he has proved himself of generous character in all his dealings with Ruth and Naomi (3:18).

Naomi left Bethlehem full and returned empty (1:21). As the story ends her heart is full again. She lost her 'lads' in Moab; now another little 'lad' called Obed sits in her lap. Her generosity to Ruth brings blessing to Naomi. The townswomen say that Obed shall be a restorer of life to you.

Generosity restored Naomi's life. Generosity is essential for you and I flourish, individually, in our church, in our community. Generosity reflected God's generosity to us. Generous discipleship is about giving and receiving and we are blessed by both. Generosity restores our life.

RUTH: THE GIFT OF SACRIFICIAL GENEROSITY

Back in the day 'widow's weeds' were a sign of mourning. Now Ruth is planning to marry. Naomi tells her to put on her best clothes and perfume; they show she is free and willing and eligible to marry. The description of the meeting of Ruth and Boaz at the threshing floor anticipates the marriage.

'Boaz will tell you what to do', says Naomi. Boaz doesn't get the chance! Ruth acts, freely and decisively. Ruth takes control of the situation. When Ruth asks Boaz to 'spread the edge of his cloak' over her that's the equivalent of Ruth getting down on one knee. She pops the question.



Ruth had options. She was free to marry anyone, rich or poor. But Ruth (1:16) wants no future that doesn't include Naomi. In the intimacy of the threshing floor and in public after the wedding Ruth shows us her generous character and her sacrificial generosity:

- By choosing to marry Boaz Ruth provides home and happiness for herself and Boaz - and for Naomi. Elimelech's land is redeemed and with their child the family line continues. That's why Boaz says that Ruth's proposal is her greatest act of loving kindness.
- Ruth gives more in keeping her commitment to Naomi. She shares her new life and the life of her child with Naomi. The women even say, 'Naomi has a son!' (4:17).

Years ago Amy Carmichael put it very simply: you can give without loving but you cannot love without giving. Generous discipleship should cost us something. They say we should give till it hurts. Maybe. But often our pain threshold is pretty low! Ruth invites us to journey towards sacrificial generosity. [1]

One last thing about Ruth's generous discipleship here. When we met Boaz in chapter 2 he is a 'man of wealth'. Now in 3:11 Boaz says that Ruth is a 'woman of virtue'. But in the Hebrew bible the word for 'wealth' and 'virtue' are exactly the same. Boaz is generous with his money. Ruth doesn't have two pennies to rub together. But in generous character and sacrificial giving she is entirely Boaz' equal.

Ruth's generous heart and Boaz generous giving are not alternatives. They are two sides of the same coin. We don't get to choose to be generous in heart but not in hand. We don't get to give time and talents but not our treasure. Generosity is not only what we give; generosity is who we are.

[1] To develop this theme: offered land for free to build an altar (a threshing floor as it happens!) King David replied: 'I will not make a sacrifice that costs me nothing' (1 Chron 21:24). Paul expresses this most powerfully in 2 Cor 8:9: For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

BOAZ: SET FREE BY GENEROSITY

Finally, we look again at Boaz because he teaches us that generosity and integrity set us free from the trappings of wealth.

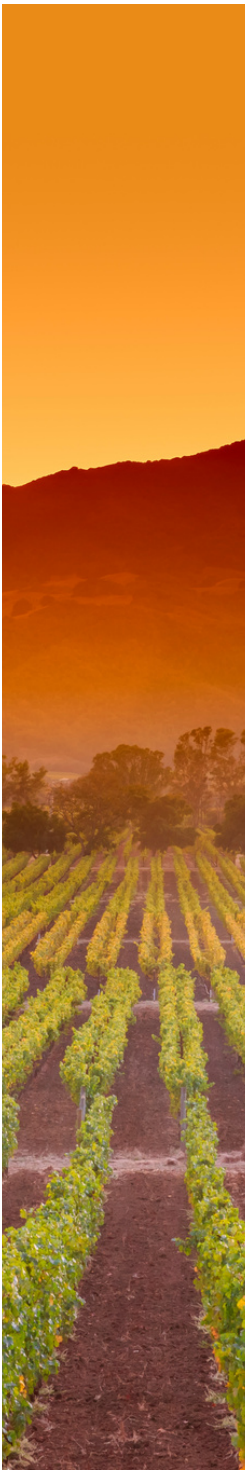
Boaz has already shown himself generous. In this passage he also shows he has integrity, first at the threshing floor with Ruth and then at the city gates with the elders. Ruth finds Boaz sleeping by a huge pile of grain and he gives Ruth a huge gift, six measures of grain. The grain will feed Ruth and Naomi but this gift is about more than food. It's like an engagement ring. It's a promise of marriage to Ruth but it is to be given to Naomi. It says that Naomi will not be left behind by Boaz' marriage to Ruth. Generosity with integrity.

Our giving meets needs. Our giving pays the bills that keep our church open. Our giving is the cost of our clergy. Our giving sustains our mission and ministry. But giving is also about our relationship to God. It takes the temperature of our hearts. For Zacchaeus generosity was a sign of the change of his heart. Jesus said, *where your treasure is, there your heart is also.*

Then at the city gates Boaz also shows the integrity that is part of generous discipleship. Boaz wants to act but there is a nearer kinsman with a prior claim to Naomi's land. Boaz would benefit financially from buying Naomi's land but he doesn't grab the money, he gives first refusal to the nearer kinsman. But the nearer kinsman will not buy the land if he has to take Ruth as well because it would threaten his financial situation. Boaz is under no legal obligation to marry Ruth but he wants to and, as kinsman-redeemer, he will do the right thing so that the name of Elimelech, Chilion and Mahlon is not lost. With generosity and integrity Boaz acts.

The thing about generous giving is that giving generously, sacrificially, releases us from the power of wealth. Zacchaeus chose the path of generous integrity which released him from the love of money. That's the wealthy are advised to, 'do good, to be rich in good works, generous, and ready to share, thus storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future. (1Tim 6:18)

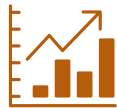




GENEROUS DISCIPLES TODAY: THREE ASKS, THREE ACTIONS

The story ends with home and happiness for Naomi, Ruth and Boaz. Except it doesn't. Hattie May Wyatt's simple childlike generosity of hand and heart was a ripple that became a wave. The generosity of hand and heart in the book of Ruth left a legacy no one could have imagined: a King for Israel.

Here's the thing. The gospel invites us today to make discipleship decisions to be generous in hand and heart. The promise in the book of Ruth is that our shared generosity today leaves a rich legacy for the church tomorrow. So three challenges about generous discipleship, for today and tomorrow:



- Ruth invites us to sacrificial giving. Our first challenge is to review our giving to the life and ministry of our church. To go beyond the transactional giving that pays the bills to a transformational giving that changes lives, including our own.



- Boaz invites us to grow step by step in generous giving and to find freedom from the gravitational pull of money in our lives. So our second challenge is join the Parish Giving Scheme. It's the most efficient and effective way for us to give to our church.



- Naomi invites us to know the blessing of generosity for us, for our church today and for our church tomorrow. Our final challenge is to consider leaving a legacy in our will. The gracious gift of a legacy can make possible things we can only dream of.

Week Two: Background Notes

OLD TESTAMENT

Ruth 3:1-15; 4:2-6; 9-10; 13-17

EPISTLE

2 Corinthians 9:12-15 or 1 Tim 6:17-19

GOSPEL READING

Luke 19:1-10

In 2:1 the story teller reports Naomi's terse, 'go my daughter'. In 3:1 Here Naomi speaks with agency: 'I must find a home for you' translates a question: 'shall I not seek for you a rest?'



We note four things:

- The question form in Hebrew indicates Naomi's serious intent to act.
- The word 'rest' picks up Naomi's generous hope for Ruth in 1:9. 'Rest' has a sense of security which, for Ruth, is provided by a husband. But 'rest' also carries a sense of God's promise to Israel (Dt 12:9; 1 Kgs 8:56) and his presence with Israel (Num 10:33; 1 Chron 28:2; Ps 132:8). The still waters of Psalm, 23 are 'water of rest'.
- There is no indication here that Naomi's intent is a Levirate marriage which would secure Elimelech's line. Rather her intent is a settled future for Ruth.
- The accompanying phrase, 'that it might go well with you' is common in the OT, expressing security, blessing and interestingly often linked with obedience to God (Gen 12:13., Dt 4:40, 5:16,33 Jer 7:23, 42:6)

Naomi's prayer is now action. She has hope, energy, agency. The difference is generosity: Ruth's love and Boaz' generosity of hand is a sign of a generous character who will act on their behalf.



AT THE THRESHING FLOOR

The language of Ruth's preparations and her visit to Boaz is intimate. In 3:4 Ruth is to 'uncover' Boaz' feet or legs and 'lie down'. 'Feet' may be meant literally but is also a euphemism (Ex 4:25; Jud 3:24; Dt 28:57). The verbs 'uncover' and 'lie down' frequently refer to sexual relations (Lev 18, 20).

The ambiguity of this intimacy is intentional, anticipatory of Ruth's marriage proposal at the threshing floor. The bathing, scented oils and clothing may be Ruth dispensing with what an earlier generation called 'widow's weeds'. They signal the setting aside of her widow's status and her marriageability. As such, they are indicative of Ruth's agency and her freedom to act. Verse 3:5 notes Ruth's obedience to Naomi who tells Ruth, 'He will tell you what to do'. But it is Ruth who tells a startled Boaz what to do.



Boaz sleeps by the pile of grain; surely intentional. Boaz has gifted Ruth a surplus of roasted barley (2:1b) and she takes a single measure of barley home from her gleaning (an ephah in 2:17). Here Boaz gifts Ruth six unspecified measures of grain, a greater gift and a token of his promise. [1]

Boaz is 'afraid' or 'startled' (1:8); the Hebrew 'to shiver' may suggest fear or simply that cool midnight air awoke Boaz. Impersonal terms are used, 'the man' and 'the woman'. Possibly suggestive of marriage the impersonal terms then focus Ruth's agency and significance: I am Ruth, your handmaid'.

Ruth describes herself as is handmaid here (ama); in 2:13 Ruth called herself a maid-servant (sipha). The words may mean the same but likely the maid-servant of 2:13 implies deference and lower social status whilst handmaid here indicates a different social status and a woman eligible for marriage.

The phrase 'spread therefore thy skirt' meaning the corner of Boaz' cloak signifies marriage (Ez 16:8; Dt 22:30; 27:20; Mal 2:16), as Boaz knows (3:10). There is an important word play in the Hebrew. The Hebrew word for 'skirt' in 3:10 is *kānāp*. In 2:12 Boaz prays that God will reward Ruth, 'under whose wings (*kānāp*) you have come to take refuge. In marriage, proposed by Ruth, Boaz will do what he prayed God would do for Ruth. His generosity is God's blessing.

Significantly, Boaz says that this loving kindness (*hesed*) of Ruth is richer even than the care for Naomi already shown (2:11-12). Ruth had other options: younger men, wealthy men. But her passionate declaration of commitment in 1:16 precludes any marriage that sets aside Naomi.

As noted earlier, in 2:1 Boaz is a mighty man of 'wealth', an *ish gabor hayil*. Here in 3:11 Ruth is a woman of 'virtue' or 'noble character', an *ishah hayil*. She has no material wealth but she is Boaz' equal in the practice of generosity.

[1] Paul says this to Corinth. See the richness of the words he uses with common English translations: For the rendering (*diakonia*; deacon) of this ministry (*leitourgia*; liturgy) not only supplies the needs of the saints but also overflows with many thanksgivings (*eucharistia*; Eucharist) to God (2 Cor 9:12)

AT HOME

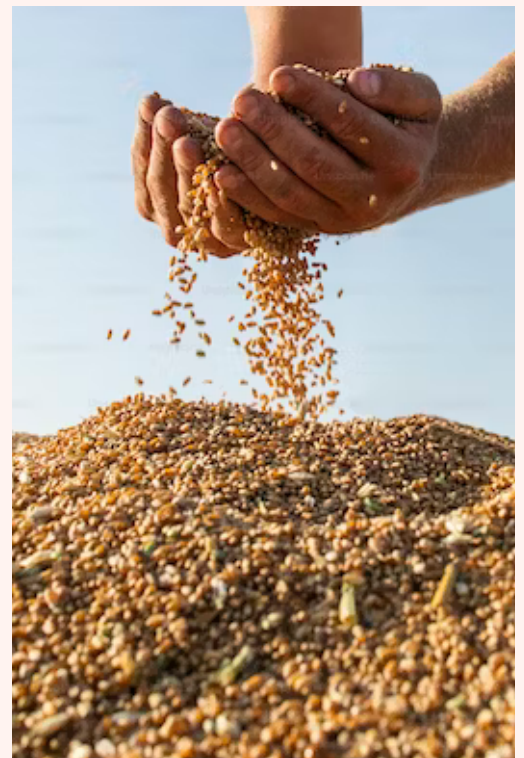
Ruth is a story of women. One woman transfers allegiance from a dead male to a living female. But briefly at the city gates the focus is male concerns with lineage and land. Naomi is talked about not talked to. Ruth is again the Moabite, the widow of Mahlon.[1] But the story of women reasserts itself. The men sing the praises of Ruth the Moabite, naming Ruth alongside Rachel and Leah, matriarchs of Israel. The joyful women celebrate with Naomi.

'The Lord made Ruth conceive' references God's direct action in 1:6, food to his people and is echoed in the women's words, 'the Lord has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer'. It is significant. All the matriarchs of Israel conceived by God's intervention: Sarah (Gen 21:1-2); Rebecca (Gen 25:21); Leah (Gen 29:31); Rachel (Gen 30:22). Ruth is part of God's purpose for Israel. Her legacy; Israel's King.

In the closing scene (4:13-17) Ruth and Boaz leave the story, not even naming their child. The women cry, a child is born to Naomi. This may imply unknown legal custom, adoption or Obed's inheritance of land or Naomi's role as nurse. More likely it is simply that Ruth generously shared the life of her child with Naomi as she had shared everything else.

There is a moving play on words. In 1:5 Naomi loses her two 'lads' (yeled), an unusual term for adult men but chosen because in 4:16 Naomi has a lad (yeled). The child is Naomi's kinsman-redeemer. If Boaz dies Obed would sustain Naomi and Ruth.

The townswomen tell Naomi that Obed will 'renew your life'. Literally this means 'cause life to return'; the same 'return' used multiple times in chapter one on the Road from Moab to Judah. Naomi says she left full, returned empty (1:21). With Obed life returns and Naomi is full again.



More practically perhaps, Obed will 'feed your grey hairs', meaning to provide with food. This compound blessing of returning life and feeding old age goes beyond simple survival to a promise of human flourishing. It is the work of generous discipleship, of grace filled love.

Most significantly, this twofold blessing is because your daughter in law loves you (4:15). The word order emphatically points to Ruth who 'loves you' and despite her recent marriage Ruth is still Naomi's daughter in law. Ruth's loving kindness, Ruth's sacrificial generosity culminates in gifting Naomi a child to share her life: 'A son is born to Naomi' (4:17). A king is promised to Israel.

[1] Phyllis Trible wryly notes how the story briefly moves from justice for living females to justice for dead males.



ADDITIONAL NOTE: RUTH'S PERSONAL JOURNEY

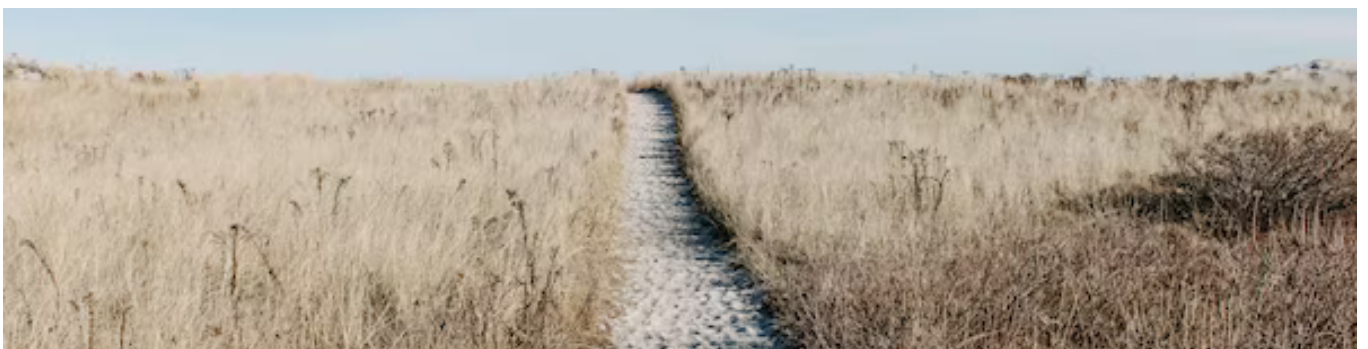
Ruth in 1:4 is a childless widow from pagan Moab. Leaving Moab she is a 'daughter in law' alongside Naomi. Ruth is not named again until, in verse 14, she clings to Naomi. In Bethlehem Ruth is defined by her difference: Ruth the Moabite. When Boaz asks about Ruth in the gleaning field he doesn't ask who is she but whose is she? Who has responsibility for her?

But in 2: 8 Boaz, when he knows who Ruth is, calls her 'my daughter', in part perhaps reference to age difference but more so due to her care for Naomi. Ruth bows to the ground and calls herself a maid-servant, not even equal to Boaz's other maid-servants. But in 2:20 at day's end Naomi tells Ruth, 'Boaz is our kinsman' and she says the same in 3:2.



At midnight at the threshing floor Boaz no longer enquires, whose is she? He now asks, Who are you? The reply: I am Ruth; no longer a maid servant but the less deferential handmaid, likely indicating Ruth's eligibility for marriage. For legal reasons at the city gates Ruth is again the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon. But the story ends with the elders celebrating Ruth alongside Rachel and Leah. Her child, Obed, gifted by the Lord will be like Perez, born to Judah and Tamar (Gen 38:1-30) an ancestor to King David. And so it proved to be (Ruth 4:18-22).

Ruth's journey is a model of personal discipleship, growing into her calling to serve the purposes of God. It is this personal growth that underpins Ruth's boldness and agency as she says to Boaz in effect: I can and now want to marry; I have options but will never leave Naomi and you have an obligation to us. Make me your wife. Generosity of heart and hand meets the needs of others, enables us to grow in stature as the children of a heavenly Father and glorifies our generous God.



APPENDIX 2: THE 57 CENTS [1]

It's a Baptist church in Philadelphia in the early 1880's. There are children milling around outside the Sunday School rooms because there is not enough space inside. One of them is Hattie May Wiatt. The pastor, Russell Conwell, sees her and carries her on his shoulders into the Sunday School. A day or two later he meets Hattie going to day school. He tells Hattie the church is raising money for a new Sunday School, big enough for all the children to get in.

Times were hard and tragically Hattie May died not too long afterwards. At the funeral Hattie's mum gave Pastor Conwell a little bag. It contained 57 cents that Hattie had saved towards the new Sunday School. The gift might have purchased a few bricks in those days. That's all. But it was a child's mite – and that's how the congregation saw it.

Pastor Conwell was as wise as he was kind. He showed the purse to the Church; the first gift towards the new building. He changed the cents into pennies and offered them for sale to the congregation. The sale raised \$250. It was enough to buy a house next door to the church of the new Sunday School. But the story doesn't stop there.

Amazingly 54 of the 57 pennies came back with the dollars. Few people wanted to buy a bit of a child's generous giving. The 54 cents were put in a frame in the church. It was a visible reminder of Hattie's generosity to encourage others. The church set up the Wiatt Mite Society to grow Hattie's gift. But the story doesn't stop there.

You see, generosity is contagious. Soon the congregation was too big for their church building. They needed a bigger church but it wasn't a wealthy congregation and they had an outstanding mortgage and no money. Pastor Conwell went to see a Mr Baird who owned land nearby. Baird would sell but wanted \$30,000 for the land. Conwell said they had 54 cents! Pastor Conwell has a chat with the church elders then goes back to Mr Baird. He said he would sell the land for a knockdown price of \$25,000. He asked for an immediate first payment of 54cents! Mr Baird later returned the 54 cents as a gift. He did not want to own a piece of Hattie's generous heart.

Today in Philadelphia you can still find Temple Baptist Church (not the one built on Mr Baird's land) and it has a very large Sunday School. And in the church there is a frame holding 54 cents. Hattie's story encourages the church of today to be generous just as her story inspired earlier congregations.

Because the house purchased by the Wiatt Mite Society for the \$250 raised by Hattie's 57 cents hosted the very first classes of Temple College: night classes run by the church so working people could study in the evening. Today Temple College is called Temple University, founded in 1884. The church built on the land sold by Mr Baird is on the campus and is now their Centre for Performing Arts. And not very far away is the hospital, originally two hospitals, which the church founded to support the poor in the community. Today it is Temple University Hospital.

In a sermon on 1st December 1912 Pastor Conwell told the story of Hattie May Wiatt. He estimated 80,000 students had passed through the Temple College since 1884. He estimated that 30,000 people used the dispensary in one of the church hospitals and 14,000 workmen had been helped by the other. He estimated 2,000 clergy had graduated from their studies and said, 'Think of it – two thousand people preaching the Gospel because Hattie May Wiatt invested her 54 cents; because she laid the foundations...'

Hattie May Wiatt's generosity is a golden thread in the tapestry of the ministry of Temple Baptist Church. Pastor Conwell was by all accounts a superb preacher and in closing his 1912 sermon with a flourish said this:

Men may have powers of eloquence, they may sing with all the sweetness of angelic voices, and yet they may not speak as Hattie May Wiatt speaks tonight, as she will speak through your life as you go out and do differently from what you would have done if you had not been here.

Generosity is contagious.

[1] This text is a retelling of the story; the facts are true. The primary source is a sermon by Hattie's pastor, Russell H Conwell on Sunday 1st December 1912. The story is freely found in various forms on the internet