

December 15, 2019 – Ruth 3 – Joy, for this Kindness is Greater

(Put pashmina over head.) I, Naomi, am very glad to see you again. I can hardly wait to tell you what has happened since we last met. What has transpired between Boaz and Ruth! You may have a difficult time believing that such a large measure of joy could come from events that once seemed so hopeless. Oi Vavoy! Just wait till you hear, what happened at the end of the harvest season. But what happened was just the start of much more to come.

As you already know, Ruth gleaned in Boaz' fields for the duration of the harvest season. But knowing that when the harvest ends, Ruth loses her opportunity to be regularly in the company of Boaz, I continued to pray to God, who I believe divulged to me his amazing plan for our family.

You may recall that when my sons died, I told their Moabite wives to return to their homes to find new lives with new husbands. But Ruth made a new life & home with me in Bethlehem. Over the months, she saw Boaz on a daily basis, growing a close, trusted relationship with him.

So, when the right time came, I said to Ruth, "My daughter, I must find a home for you, where you will be well provided for. Now Boaz, with whose women you have worked, is a relative of ours. Tonight, he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. Wash, put on perfume, and get dressed in your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don't let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do." In other words, I told Ruth to take action in proposing marriage to Boaz. Uncovering his feet at night, uncovered her intent. Boaz would know that, according to our traditions!

Trembling with a bit of fear, but mostly with excitement I think, Ruth answered, "I will do whatever you say." She prepared herself as I instructed. She looked beautiful and beamed with joy at the idea that God might provide for her a generous and kind new husband in Boaz.

Then Ruth went to the threshing floor and did everything I told her to do. According to her detailed account, when Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits, as I told her would happen, he went over to lie down at the far end of the grain pile. Then, shaking with joy and anticipation, Ruth went quietly, uncovered his feet, and lay down.

In the middle of the night, Ruth told me that something startled the man. Perhaps a nudge from God? Or maybe Ruth? At awakening, Boaz saw there was a woman lying at his feet! But in the dark, he could not distinguish who she was. So, he asked, "Who are you?"

Still awake, unable to sleep, wondering what might happen, Ruth quickly answered, "I am your servant Ruth." Then she asked him to accept her proposal of marriage. She remembered his earlier prayer of blessing over her, when she asked why she found favor in his eyes, why he showed kindness to a foreigner, a Moabite. She remembered that he had prayed for her, "May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge." She knew that the Lord often granted refuge and provision in practical ways. For a woman this often meant coming under the prayer shawl of her husband. Standing under the

marriage chuppah, the wings and canopy of Lord, a couple covenanted to became yoked and united by God to each other. And, like Rebecca, our ancestor, who expressed her choice to marry Isaac, by putting on wedding jewelry and entering his tent, Ruth proposed marriage to Boaz. So, she asked of Boaz, “Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a guardian-redeemer of our family.”

Without a moment of hesitation, Boaz responded. In great joy, he exclaimed, “The Lord bless you, my daughter. This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier.” Boaz meant that Ruth showed more kindness to him in her proposal than the kindness that she showed in remaining with me upon the death of her first husband, my son.

Boaz explained further, “You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor.”

He then assured her, “And now, my daughter, don’t be afraid. I will do for you all you ask.”

He also complemented Ruth, expressing how he thought of her, in language modeled after the noble woman in Proverbs 31! Oi vavoy! Such a complement.

Like the husband of the noble woman in the proverb, Boaz, too, is a noble man. He knew that he must keep the Torah. So, he explained to Ruth, “Although it is true that I am a guardian-redeemer of our family, there is another who is more closely related than I.”

When Ruth heard of the relative, she remembered how Naomi told her the story of how Judah refused to carry out the marriage custom of providing his third son in marriage to Tamar. She also remembered how God provided a son to Tamar despite Judah’s refusal to fulfill his duty. Ruth trusted that God would provide again.

Then Boaz instructed, “Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to do his duty as your guardian-redeemer, good; let him redeem you. But if he is not willing, as surely as the Lord lives, I will do it. Lie here until morning.”

So, Ruth lay at his feet until morning, but got up without sleep before anyone could recognize her. Boaz then said, in protecting Ruth’s reputation, “No one must know that a woman came to the threshing floor.”

When Ruth returned home, I was waiting to hear what happened with Boaz. So, without even greeting her, I asked immediately, “How did it go, my daughter?”

Oi Vavoy. When Ruth showed me the grain that Boaz gave her in an even more ample supply than the first time, I knew that this was a generous deposit on the bride dower for Ruth. I knew that Boaz was clearly demonstrating his desire to provide for Ruth as her husband, God willing.

I rejoice at the encounter between Ruth and Boaz, who seemed filled with joy at the prospect of their marriage union. Needing to wait until business hours opened at the city gate of

Bethlehem, I instructed Ruth, “Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man, Boaz will not rest until the matter is settled today.”

I look forward to seeing you again next week, when I can tell you what happens! Now Ruth and I have to go to the city gate. We are so full of anticipation. I will be glad to see you again soon. Shalom!

Matthew 1:18-25 (Take pashmina off of head.)

Boaz was not the only man in the Bible to show such kindness to his bride-to-be. Joseph, the betrothed of Mary and stepfather of Jesus, demonstrated similar kindness to his fiancé. Like Boaz, Joseph, too, in his kindness did not depart from the Torah. Joseph, as did Boaz, showed integrity and goodness in his character. Hear the account from Matthew 1:18-25.

18This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. 19Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.

20But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph son of David, do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife, because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. 21She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.”

22All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: 23“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).

24When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of the Lord had commanded him and took Mary home as his wife. 25But he did not consummate their marriage until she gave birth to a son. And he gave him the name Jesus.

This ends the reading in Matthew 1.

Both Boaz and Joseph were good and kind, sure to bring joy to their brides and their families.

Of course, the supreme joy comes through Jesus, the son of living God. Of Jesus, Mary sings in Luke 1:46a: “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!”

May the Joy of Jesus fill us, as we this Advent anticipate his coming again. Amen.