

December 8, 2019 – “Fields of Peace”

RUTH 2: (*Put pashmina over head.*) As you know, my name is Naomi. When we first met, I told you of the famine in Bethlehem and of my return home there with Ruth, the Moabite, widow of my late son. I also confessed to you of my bitterness toward God, and the lack of shalom within my life.

But the brave young woman, Ruth, though intensely hated by my people as a Moabite, knew the ways of the Lord and his promises of hope and shalom. She knew that the Torah required that those who harvest the grain leave behind a portion to provide for poor widows and their children. Ruth knew that gleaning was granted in the Torah as a means of provision from God for widows. Both Ruth and I, as widows, were entitled to glean the grain left behind. We knew that there was no other acceptable way for widowed women to get food to eat.

Oi. Vavoy. Yet we also knew that the work of gleaning is strenuous. But even more extremely dangerous for a foreign woman, who had no “ezer,” no guardian, no redeemer, no one to protect her. And, as a young woman, foreign or not, Ruth also could fall victim to violence and assault.

Still in knowing this, but in keeping faith, Ruth asked, “Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain.” To her request, she added, “Behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor.” She did not hesitate. She did not flinch in fear.

She knew The Lord through my son, her late husband, but Ruth did not know what I knew. I knew that in Bethlehem, there lived a relative named Boaz from my husband’s clan. Still, I did not tell Ruth to go to his field, because I did not know how Boaz would respond to Ruth, a Moabite.

Before answering Ruth’s request to glean in the fields, I prayed. I asked. I looked to God. Then I waited. And in short time, despite all odds, I felt no fear. I trusted. I had shalom. Only then did I look at Ruth and say, “Go ahead, my daughter.” Of course, I also prayed for her during her entire absence. I prayed, too, for Boaz.

Oi. Vavoy. The long wait! Ruth did not return to me until late evening. Then she brought with her a large bushel of barley! I was stunned. Most of all I was thankful to see how much God provided for me and this Moabite woman!

Then I asked, “Where did you glean today? Where did you work?” Thinking of Boaz, without telling Ruth, I added, “Blessed be the man who took notice of you!” Ruth exclaimed, “The name of the man I worked with today is Boaz!”

This time I blessed Boaz by name! I explained to Ruth, “He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead. That man is our close relative; he is one of our guardian-redeemers!”

Now understanding, Ruth added, “He even said to me, ‘Stay with my workers until they finish harvesting all my grain.’” In other words, Boaz invited Ruth to glean in his fields

until the harvest of barley and wheat was finished, for the entire harvesting season. Through Boaz's kindness and generosity, both Ruth and I had plenty of food to eat the entire season. We did not go hungry.

Ruth told more details of her day in the fields of Boaz to me. She described how when Boaz discovered Ruth in his fields, he referred to her as "his daughter." In doing so, Boaz affirmed Ruth as a relative to me and to him.

Then he insisted, "Listen to me. Don't go & glean in another field & don't go away from here. Stay here with the women who work for me. Watch the field where the men are harvesting, & follow along after the women." In saying this, he affirmed that he willingly acted in the role of guardian redeemer to Ruth and I. He also protected Ruth, that she might work in his fields in complete shalom and without harm. He told her, "I have told the men not to lay a hand on you." He, too, invited her to partake of his water, telling Ruth, "And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled." Boaz afforded Ruth the same advantages that Aksah, during the early time of the Judges, gained from Caleb her father, as I described to you last time I saw you!

Ruth recognized that thru Boaz she received the favor that she sought, when she asked me to allow her to glean. For that favor she responded to Boaz & even more to The Lord in gratitude. She "bowed down with her face to the ground." Then Ruth asked Boaz, "Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me – a foreigner."

At this Boaz responded in kindness to me, Naomi, honoring my deceased husband & our family line. He explained to Ruth, "I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband – how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before." Then he blessed Ruth, as I had blessed him. Boaz said to Ruth, "May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by The Lord, God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge."

Ruth then requested, "May I continue to find favor in your eyes. You have put me at ease by speaking kindly to your servant – though I do not have the standing of one of your servants." Boaz then invited Ruth to share a meal with him, though sitting at the same table with a Gentile foreigner was unheard of among the Jews. Boaz showed grace to Ruth also by giving her barley to bring to me.

After I heard the account, I directed Ruth, "It will be good for you, my daughter, to go with the women who work for him, because in some else's field you might be harmed."

The barley fields of Israel might have been a place of awful violence for Ruth, the Moabite. But instead, with the guardianship of Boaz, our kinsman redeemer, his barley field in Bethlehem became a house of bread and a place of shalom for us.

Luke 2:8-14

(Take pashmina off of head.) But as the age of the judges ended, when kings were raised up in Israel, relationship with the Moabite kingdom was all but peaceful. War occurred over and over between Israel and Moab, along with the brother kingdom to Moab, Ammon. Still while war raged between her people and those of Boaz, Ruth lived at peace among her new family and in her new homeland.

Further, the promise of peace came to the land at the arrival of the long-awaited prince of peace, Jesus. Luke 2 tells of how news of his birth was proclaimed by an angel who announced to shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. The angel said, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. [11](#) Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the The Lord. [12](#) This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” Then a great company of angels praising God, appeared saying, [14](#) “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” This ends the reading in Luke 2.

Just as the favor of Boaz came to Ruth, the favor and peace of God in the highest heaven came to earth at the birth of Jesus, the prince of peace.

Again, this good news came to all people, including shepherds living out in the fields nearby. Shepherds, who by their line of work, were considered unclean, like the Moabite people, and held in low regard by the Hebrew people.

We might remember, too, what was nearby those shepherd fields. The little town of Bethlehem was nearby! The town where Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz lived. Imagine the peaceful, pastoral scene. A hill dotted by sheep, bleating softly in the night, with stars twinkling overhead and light from the little town of Bethlehem flickering in the distance. What a peaceful scene. We have probably imagined it countless times during this season of the year.

But here’s the question. Whose fields exactly? Surely, we can’t know exactly what fields can we? Actually, we do. The pastures where the shepherds watched their sheep was near Bethlehem. Between the pastures and the town, at the bottom of the hill where the sheep grazed, was none other than the fields of Boaz, the fields of peace for Ruth. Boaz’s fields are also fields of peace for us, distinguishing the location and foundation of our dear Savior’s birth. So, we too like the angels can praise God and join in saying, “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.” The favor and peace of God rested on Ruth. May the favor and peace of Christ, the Son of God, too, rest on us. Amen.