

Ruth Chapter 4 1-12 – Doing the Right Thing

The American writer Mark Twain famously said – “It’s never wrong to do the right thing” And I read the following words in a blog recently:

“Deep down you know what the right thing is, and you know good from bad. The knowledge you need to make better decisions comes from doing the right thing and seeing the result. The results that come from doing the right thing are crystal clear and they’ll give you the evidence you need to keep on doing the right thing. This is not about being a do-gooder; it’s about being human and getting what you want while serving others at the same time”.

The practice of not cutting corners but doing the right thing by working through the right process is a lesson we’ll see being played out in today’s passage.

We come to the fourth and final chapter of the book of Ruth this morning and you’ll remember that at the end of Chapter 3, Naomi had advised Ruth to “wait my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out”. This was in response to the actions that she and Ruth had taken in order to secure an alliance with Boaz.

So now in Chapter 4 we’re told that Boaz wasted no time in going to The Gate of the town early the following morning where there would very likely have been many people gathering either to set up their stalls for the day or to conduct some other business or deal with legal affairs. Gates are often mentioned in the Bible as the place where such things take place for example in Proverbs 31 verse 31, we read “Give her of the fruit of her hands, and let her works praise her in the gates”.

Now Hebrew law says that land and other possessions belonging to a man who dies does not automatically go to his widow but to his children so that the family name can be maintained. However, in Naomi’s case, we already know that not only her husband Elimalech, but both her sons have died, so whoever takes on Elimalech’s land will also be obliged to take the widowed daughter-in-law Ruth as his wife and be prepared for the name of Elimalech to be carried forward through any children that they may have together.

So, Boaz knows that by going to the city gates early in the morning as the day’s business is starting, he will easily be able to muster up a quorum for the necessary decisions to be discussed and agreed upon. As we heard in the previous Chapter, there is another kinsman redeemer who actually has the first rights to Elimalech’s estate and therefore to enter into a marriage with Ruth. And Boaz, knowing this to be the case is eager to do the right thing and follow the right process even though he knows he is risking his chances of being able to marry Ruth himself. After all, he could just have married her and said nothing to the other redeemer, but that was not his way. We were told back in verse 2 that Boaz is a worthy man and his behaviour here is further testament to that.

Now here we go with our coincidences or rather God’s providence again! This other redeemer just happens to walk by! We’re not told his name which a bit is odd in a book

where so many other names are mentioned, we're merely told in verse 1 that Boaz invites him to come and take a seat at the gate which he does.

Boaz then goes on to ensure that there are enough elders gathered together at the Gate so that they can witness any deals that are struck between the redeemers. So, Boaz now takes his first risk by telling the kinsmen redeemer that Naomi wishes to sell the land belonging to her late husband and that this man is indeed the first in line to redeem it. The redeemer makes no hesitation in saying yes, he will redeem the land. This wasn't meant to happen! Are Boaz's chances of getting Ruth slipping through his fingers? Well, no they're not because Boaz then explains to the Redeemer that if he takes the land, he must also, according to the law, take Ruth to be his wife. This puts a different slant on things for the new redeemer! Extra land he was happy with, but a wife thrown in is not what he expected! He quickly in verse 6 changes tack completely and says "I cannot redeem it for myself lest I impair my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it". Phew! Boaz is still in with a chance after all!! Another tradition in those times to attest to exchanges and the redeeming of possessions was for the man who is striking a deal with another must take off his sandal and hand it to the other person, so the unnamed redeemer quickly takes off his sandal and gives it to Boaz who declares to the witnessing elders that the deal has been struck and that he, Boaz will redeem all that belonged to Elimalech. He says in verses 9&10 "You are witnesses this day that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimalech and all that belonged to Chilion and to Mahlon. Also, Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Mahlon, I have bought to be my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brothers and from the gate of his native place. You are witnesses this day".

Now I'm sure that Boaz was very happy that he was going to be able to marry Ruth, but we must remember that he was also in doing that prepared to give up his own family name in favour of that of Elimalech which was a really selfless act and gives us further knowledge of the integrity of the man that we were first introduced to back at the beginning of chapter 2 as being a worthy man. Dietrich Bonhoeffer says "Marriage is more than your love for each other. It has a higher dignity and power, for it is God's holy ordinance, through which He wills to perpetuate the human race till the end of time. In your love you see only your two selves in the world, but in marriage you are a link in the chain of the generations, which God causes to come and to pass away to His glory, and calls into His kingdom" and I'm reminded of the words in Matthew 6:33 and which we sang earlier in the service today "But seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you". By doing the right thing and following the right process in the eyes of God, Boaz got the result he wanted but he got it for the right reasons and that is a real lesson that we must remember ourselves isn't it? Today, if a couple say to Jon that they want to be married in church or if parents want to bring their child for baptism, he will tell them of the process that they need to go through before that can happen. You see to do the right thing in the eyes of God, we must all follow the process whatever it may be, just as Boaz did. If we focus on God's righteousness and his kingdom and all he has done for us in Jesus, we too will be the recipients of the grace and mercy of our loving God.

Boaz's declaration to the elders was met with prayers of celebration when in verses 11 & 12 they cried out "We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your house, like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you act worthily

in Ephrathah and be renowned in Bethlehem, and may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring that the Lord will give you by this young woman". You see, as we so often find in the Bible, God on so many occasions works through the most unlikely characters in bringing his plan of salvation to fulfilment through Jesus. Think about Abraham and Sarah being blessed with their son Isaac when they were both very old and here, we see Ruth the foreigner from the enemy land of Moab, being blessed with a marriage to the worthy and honourable Boaz. God is interested in all nations and all people and this is one example of him bringing people of different backgrounds and cultures together. Another important life lesson there, especially in this day and age. There is evidence of lots of prayer throughout the book of Ruth and again we should take the importance of prayer in our own lives very seriously and never forget that our heavenly father loves us and wants us to lean on him.

The chapter ends with a detailed genealogy which shows us that by God's grace or providence on the lives of Ruth and Boaz, their son Obed became the father of Jesse who was the father of David and of course we know that it was from the line of David that the incarnate son of God was born in the form of the baby Jesus. Isn't it good news that Boaz stuck to the process and did the right thing?

So, in summary, this first unnamed redeemer effectively decided that the cost to him of redeeming Ruth and the land was not worth it as it would put the inheritance of his own family in jeopardy. Unlike our own Redeemer, the Lord Jesus who knowing how costly it was going to be, knew all he was going to have to suffer, knew that he was going to have to suffer death on a cross. All of this he knew he would have to go through for our sakes, for you and for me, if he was to be our one and only true Redeemer. There was a process that Jesus had to go through, a process which had been part of God's salvation plan from the very beginning and knowing that it was the right thing to do in order that the Father's promises be fulfilled, it was a cost Jesus was prepared to pay and pay he did. So, as we think about Jesus's entry into Jerusalem on that first Palm Sunday, let us also think about the fact that that was the beginning of a journey, and the beginning of a week, that would end with our Redeemer giving his life for us. Let us hold our palm crosses high and call out ride on, ride on in majesty our great Redeemer.

Amen