



Risking Faith

Ruth 3

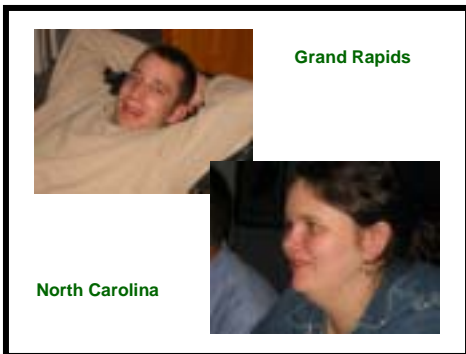


Did I tell you that our youngest son Adrian is getting married July 26? Its true!

One month to go and he will be a married man. We his parents are happy for him. We are excited and getting ready for the great event. Again Adriana and I will do the ceremony together.

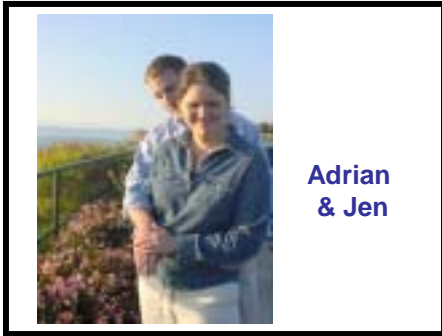


Adrian has been going out for several years with a wonderful young woman named Jennifer Napier. They met at Calvin College. She's from Marquette Michigan and was raised Baptist.



This past year Adrian and Jen lived apart. He in Grand Rapid and she in North Carolina. They lived apart because Adrian didn't feel ready for the commitment of marriage.

Even though he graduated several years ago and most of his college friends moved out or married, and his brothers were several years younger when they married, Adrian wasn't ready for matrimony and the settled life.



But finally after many hints and many conversations with Jen and encouragement from his parents, his brothers, and friends, last Valentine's day Adrian proposed to Jen on a romantic California beach that they get engaged. He thought maybe in a year or two they would marry.



But that is another story.

Now the reason I'm sharing this personal information is that it points to a pretty strong custom we have.



Namely the custom of the man proposing the marriage - the custom of the man taking the initiative for the engagement.

I remember the day when Adriana and I were dating. Just before I proposed to Adriana I felt compelled, social pressure and all, to visit Adriana's mother to ask her permission, and after that was done I could propose to Adriana.

I'll tell you it was a nerve wracking time. But I followed through with the good and tried and

everything happened in proper order.

Now the rules for arranging marriages were even more stringent in biblical times.



Women were treated as property of their fathers. And if a marriage was to take place it was all done through the negotiation of the fathers.

It was unheard of even for a boy to propose to a girl. Everything was done properly and in the right order through a match making process, and the fathers of the two families were the deal makers.

It was a business deal for them.

And if you didn't have a father you were just out of luck, you became a slave or concubine of another woman's husband.

Aren't you glad we do it different today?

What is so amazing about the story we read today is that something very unusual is happening.

Not only is a marriage being propose by



the two people involved.

The woman proposes to the man.

Yes, that is what this story is all about.

Ruth proposes to Boaz that they marry, and that they marry soon even that night.

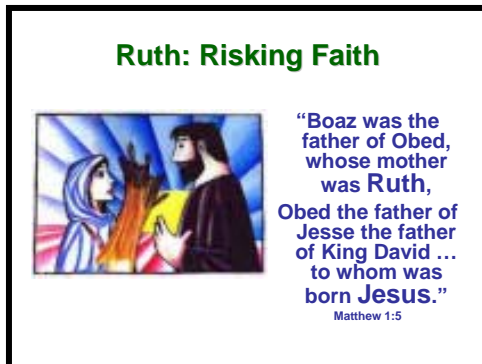
And the amazing thing is, Boaz says yes.

Boaz sees God's hand writing on the wall.

This marriage although it seems so unusual and so not the-way-we always-do-it, it was a match made in heaven.

It was match negotiated by our Father in heaven

to bring about his plans and his purpose –to bring about a home for his family.



You see, it was through this unusually marriage proposal that God himself had a son born to him, Jesus.

Jesus, as most of you know was descended from Ruth and Boaz.

They were Jesus great great grand parents. See Mt 1:5



The bible when talking about the birth of Jesus and the birth of Christians, says that Jesus and we too are not born of natural descent, nor of a man's decision, or a husbands will, but spiritually we are born of God.

And the credit for this unusual spiritual birth begins with Ruth.

This was not a marriage of natural developments or a marriage brought about by a husbands will or his desires, or a husband's negotiations with the

woman's kin.

It was a marriage made to bring a little of heaven down to earth.

It was a marriage made to bring the security of heaven a little closer to home for us.

I don't want to get into all the fine details of this marriage proposal.

But according to Hebrew custom when a woman's husband died, like Ruth, the husband's nearest relative, usually the older brother, would redeem the woman and marry her and have children with her for the sake of the dead husband.

The dead person's eternal destiny, his future depended on their family having a home of their own on Hebrew soil. That is what gave people in the Old Testament hope and security.



And that is the issue in this chapter.

Although Ruth has been accepted in the family of Naomi and Bethlehem, she does not yet have a home that will out last her life.

She does not have an eternal home. A place of eternal rest.



My daughter?

Yes, Naomi calls Ruth, my daughter in verse 1, 16, and 18; and so does Boaz, my daughter he call her, in verses 10&11.

But what good does that do in the long run.

What good do those good memories have when Naomi and Boaz die. When they're gone. Where will that leave Ruth?



What is Naomi's concern?

In the opening verse of the chapter that is Naomi's concern.

“Should I not at least try to find a home for you, where you will be provided for?”

She pray for her child as any loving parent does. But look at that word Naomi uses.

She wants to find a home for Ruth.

In the footnote we are told that in Hebrew the word used here is “rest”.



Noah Searching for REST (grace)

Naomi wants to find rest for Ruth. A rest beyond what a family can give, a rest beyond what a community can give .

Now the Hebrew word for rest is Manoah. Remember the ark builder Noah.

He too, the bible tells us, was person who was looking for manoah; a place of rest.

The word Noah and manoah comes from the word grace.

Ruth: Risking Faith



**Naomi
Praying for
REST
(grace)**

Like Noah, Naomi was searching for grace for her daughter. For God's grace, for God's provision in an empty life.

Her life had gone bitter because of decisions and action she made in the past.


Noami had given up hope for herself, she resigned to dead end future.

But she hoped beyond hope that somehow Ruth would find grace. That somehow Ruth would find rest. Rest for her soul. A redeemer who would secure a place in God's grace for her.

What are you willing to do, to find this kind of grace?

What are you willing to do to find this kind of eternal rest?

Ruth: Risking Faith



"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you REST. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, and you will find REST for your soul."

Mathew 11:28, 29

Jesus said, when he walked on the earth, come to me all you who are weary, and burdened. Come to me, all you who are troubled and worried. Come to me all you who search for home and for someone to provide, and I, Jesus, will give you rest.

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"Wash and perfume yourself and put on your best clothes."

Naomi said to Ruth,

"Ruth, tonight I want you to get all washed up, nice and baby clean. Here use some of this expensive perfume that I've been saving for such a time as this.


And go find that seductive dress you brought along from Moab hiding in the back cupboard.

Get yourself ready and go to the bedroom of your distinguished boss - our town mayor and go make yourself available to him. Go and propose to him and offer to be his wife tonight.

To what extent would you be willing to go, to find that rest Jesus promises.

That rest for your soul. That grace for your children? That grace which leads to eternal life?

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“I will go where you go. Your people will be my people. Your God will be my God.”

Ruth had taken a vow.

She had made a profession of faith.

A declaration of her intentions.

I will go where you go, your people will be my people and your God my God.

They were wonderful and touching words but was Ruth willing to walk the talk, was she willing to do whatever it took.

“I will do whatever you say,” (5) Ruth said to Naomi.


And so she went to the bedroom of Boaz and proposed marriage.

This was in obedience to Naomi, her mother,

It was in obedience to their traditions, the traditions of her people and in obedience to Naomi’s God that she stepped out in faith

and risked her life for the sake of God’s grace.

Ruth: Risking Faith



“Come follow me.”

Coming to Jesus, and finding rest for your soul,

finding a place of grace where we can have an eternal connection with God, is not unlike a marriage. Coming to Jesus is a covenant

commitment, like a marriage is a covenant commitment. It’s a matter not a talking the walk but

walking the talk.

Coming to Jesus is a decision and a willingness to

become Jesus disciple.

To follow him in sickness and in health, in good times and in bad.

To deny yourself, to even loose your life for the sake of the gospel and for Jesus.



Adrian was right to think twice about getting married. He was right about the gravity of the commitment you make when you propose marriage. It is a commitment for life.

It’s a commitment to her family and her brothers and sisters. It’s a commitment to a life together and a family together and a future together till death do you part.

It’s the same with Jesus.

Now some people at his work are telling Adrian he should think again.

Soon his life will be over.

Once the knot is tied and you're hitched you're stuck to the honey do this kind of life. A life of babies and making payments on strollers and station wagons and college tuitions.

Jesus says; all these people are right when they warn us about the cost of making commitments. Being a disciple of Jesus is being yoked together. It does mean being hitched. But the knot between Jesus and you is not a heavy burden. Jesus burden is light. His burden is fit for you. It is a perfect fit. It's a yoke that brings life and rest and joy beyond what you ever hoped for or dreamed for or imagined.



Ruth: Risking Faith

Many people in the Old Testament went to amazing lengths to find rest. To find a place in the sunshine of God's grace. To gain a place in the family of God. And even Ruth's eternal destiny, her place is not settled even after all that risk and work she did. We are left at the end of the chapter waiting to see what would happen.

So what do we 21st Century people learn from an old story like this.

Let me read you the last few lines in a commentary on this chapter. The author says:



Ruth: Risking Faith

Through Risking faith God works.

Theologically, the focus fell upon human, not divine activity.

Through human actions and faith and risk and keeping commitment, through human kindness and gracious and accepting and loving like God, God works his mysterious wonders in our lives. Yes through human ways and traditional practices Ruth, a foreigner from Moab, finds a place of eternal rest, and even a place of divine honor, in the family of God.



Ruth: Risking Faith

"God carries out his work through believers who seize unexpected opportunities as gifts from God."

In conclusion, says the commentary author, "taken as a whole, this chapter teaches us that **God carries out his work through believers who seize unexpected opportunities as gifts from God.**"

That's how the kingdom of God came near to us in Jesus and that's how the kingdom of God continues to become real in our lives today.

When we seize the unexpected opportunities God gives us, and we in faith risk our lives on God grace.

A couple of week ago I suggested that

Ruth shows us how to become a great person. A person of noble character.
A person of significance.
A person who makes a difference for the kingdom of God.
A person through whom the Holy Spirit works the miracles of God.

The question I would like to leave us today is this.



Where is God asking you and me and our church, to walk the talk right now? Most of us have made a commitment to Jesus. You have come to him. You want to follow him. But where is God asking you to step out in faith and do something that may not be the way it is always done. Or something that may even fly in the face of tradition, like Ruth proposing marriage to Boaz.

How can you, how can I, follow through on our commitment to Jesus, like really living it out? I suggest that this ancient story has a message for each of us and for our church too.