

2. GLEANING IN BOAZ'S FIELD

RUTH 2:1-23

¹Now Naomi had a kinsman on her husband's side, a prominent rich man, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz.

²And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone in whose sight I may find favour." She said to her, "Go, my daughter."

³So she went. She came and gleaned in the field behind the reapers. As it happened, she came to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelek.

⁴Just then Boaz came from Bethlehem. He said to the reapers, "YHWH be with you." They answered, "YHWH bless you."

⁵Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, "To whom does this young woman belong?"

⁶The servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, "She is the Moabite who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. ⁷She said, 'Please, let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the reapers.' So she came, and she has been on her feet from early this morning until now, without resting even for a moment."

⁸Then Boaz said to Ruth, "Now listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women.

⁹Keep your eyes on the field that is being reaped, and follow behind them. I have ordered the young men not to bother you. If you get thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young people have drawn."

The word translated here as 'kinsman' (verse 1) comes from the root *yd'*, which means 'to know', often including having a covenant relationship with. The name Boaz can mean 'in him is strength'. This is our first introduction to Boaz, and we learn that he belongs to a circle of people who have responsibilities to care for Naomi, a widowed relative.

In verse 2, Ruth, who has left her homeland to care for her mother-in-law, sets about providing for them both through her work. She is taking advantage of the custom in Israel not to reap a field clean, but to leave some behind for the poor to gather up (see Leviticus 19:9-10; 23:22; Deuteronomy 24:19).

Verses 3-17 take place in the fields where the barley is being harvested. Boaz arrives and is told by the young man who is in charge of the harvesting that the young woman who is moving along behind the reapers picking up the left-overs is from Moab, whence she came with Naomi.

Boaz is the perfect gentleman, and, like Ruth herself, is exceedingly generous.

When Ruth first went out to the fields she was hoping to find ‘someone in whose sight I may find favour’ (verse 2). She finds that person in Boaz (verse 10).

Boaz has heard of her extraordinary care for his kinswoman, Naomi (verse 11), and prays that YHWH will reward her generously (verse 12). The expression ‘under whose wings you have come for refuge’ recalls Psalm 91:1-4

You who live in the shelter of the Most High, who abide in the shadow of the Almighty, will say to YHWH, “My refuge and my fortress; my God, in whom I trust.” ... He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge.

As we have come to expect in the Book of Ruth, YHWH, the Almighty [יְהוָה, šadday; see 1:21-22] does take care of her, through Boaz. As portrayed in the story, both Ruth and Boaz are entirely genuine. Ruth is not acting so as to earn God’s favour. She is living generously, and this opens her to receive divine blessing which comes through Boaz, because, he, too, is living generously.

The story does not claim that good is automatically rewarded. It is claiming that living the covenant opens a person to divine generosity.

An ephah is a tenth of a homer, and a homer is an average donkey load. A tenth of a donkey load represents a good and fruitful day’s work

¹⁰Then she fell prostrate, with her face to the ground, and said to him, “Why have I found favour in your sight, that you should take notice of me, when I am a foreigner?”

¹¹Boaz answered her, “All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. ¹²May YHWH reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from YHWH, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!”

¹³Then she said, “May I continue to find favour in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, even though I am not even one of your servants.”

¹⁴At mealtime Boaz said to her, “Come here, and eat some of this bread, and dip your morsel in the sour wine.” So she sat beside the reapers, and he heaped up for her some parched grain. She ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over. ¹⁵When she got up to glean, Boaz instructed his young people, “Let her glean even among the standing sheaves, and do not reproach her. ¹⁶You must also pull out some handfuls for her from the bundles, and leave them for her to glean, and do not rebuke her.”

¹⁷So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley.

¹⁸She picked it up and came into the town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gleaned. Then she took out and gave her what was left over after her satisfying meal.

¹⁹Her mother-in-law said to her, "Where did you glean today? And where have you been working? Blessed be the man who took notice of you." So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, and said, "The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz."

²⁰Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, "Blessed be he by YHWH, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!" Naomi also said to her, "The man is a relative of ours, one of our nearest kin."

²¹Then Ruth the Moabite said, "He even said to me, 'Stay close by my servants, until they have finished all my harvest.'"

²²Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, "It is better, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, otherwise you might be bothered in another field."

²³So she stayed close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests; and she lived with her mother-in-law.

Naomi is delighted with what Ruth has collected, and cooks up a satisfying meal for them both.

She prays blessings on whoever it was that cared for Ruth (verse 19), only to be told that it was her kinsman, Boaz (verse 19).

In verse 20 we hear the word *hesed* ('kindness') for the second time (see 1:8). God's covenant love is expressed through the kindness of Boaz to Ruth and Naomi.

'Nearest kin' translates a verb with the root *g'l*. It is Boaz's responsibility to 'redeem' Naomi; that is to say, to see that she is looked after by helping her when she falls on hard times.

Harvesting of the barley began at Passover. The harvesting of wheat began later and concluded at Pentecost. The grain harvest lasted seven weeks.