

Scripture: Ruth 3:1-18

Title: Responsibility: Another name of Hesed / translated by Emma Choi

1. A long-term project

Ruth chapter 2 focused on the story of Ruth and Naomi. Now, the focus shifts to the story of Boaz and Ruth in the beginning of chapter 3.

For Naomi and Ruth, gleaning was a temporary and short-term way to satisfy hunger. In the last verse of chapter 2, it says that Ruth gleaned in Boaz's field from the barley harvest to the wheat harvest. The barley harvest is in early April and the wheat harvest is in late May. It means they've gleaned for about two months.

I think Naomi was probably worried and thinking, 'If we keep gleaning like this, are we going to be able survive throughout the year? Perhaps, we can survive a few months at this rate, but I didn't think we can survive for a few years.' Naomi thought of the kindness ("Hesed") that Boaz had shown to Ruth, and began to think about setting Naomi and Boaz up. And she decides to implement a long-term project for Ruth and for her family. What were the two biggest issues in the book of Ruth? They were hunger and posterity. Naomi realized that if Ruth marries Boaz, it will take care of both issues!

Look at the words of verse 1. Naomi says "My daughter, I must find a home for you, where you will be well provided for." If you cut some flowers and put it in a vase, you can enjoy it for a few days, but it will wither quickly. In order for flowers to last longer, they must be planted them in a flower garden. Establishing a family is like cultivating a field. If you make a field with good soil, all kinds of fruits will bear there and last for a long time. Naomi decides to step in and make her a home for Ruth. She decides to guide her daughter-in-law to marriage Boaz, which seems most likely to work out. Unlike the time that Ruth did not listen to Naomi and followed her when Naomi told her to go back to her Moabite family, Ruth complies this time. I think Ruth liked Boaz too.

When I first learned to drive, a friend of mine who used to be a driver in the military was sitting next to me. He seemed to be frustrated watching me drive. He gave me a word of advice. "Hey, you should look a way ahead when you are driving. Otherwise, you might get into an accident." Since then, my driving habits changed quiet a bit. Not only do you look further out when driving, but you also have to look far ahead when dealing with people. A good person is someone who looks far into the other person's life. A good leader is one who thinks about the future of those who follow him. A good PI thinks about a a big picture of the researchers and the research project in his lab and guide them to maximize their talents. A good teacher thinks about the future of the students after graduation. Good parents think about how the child can develop independence and grow their own area of expertise instead of obsessing over their grades for this school year.

2. Ruth's proposal

The story of Ruth is now moving towards its climax, a night on the threshing floor. There is not only a passionate feeling of love between a man and a woman, but also a heavy sense of self-control and responsibility in the story of this threshing floor. Ruth decides to go to the threshing floor where Boaz is staying for the night. Ruth took a bath, put on perfume, and got dressed in her best clothes. She doesn't look like a shabby stranger who usually gathers grain on the ground, but like a bride. Boaz seems to have fallen into a deep sleep after a hard day's work, having eaten all his food and perhaps a little drunk too. Ruth takes advantage of this moment and goes to lay down at Boaz's feet. In the middle of the night something startles Boaz; he turned – and there was a woman lying at his feet! He asks, "who are you?" not because he doesn't know who she is, but because he was startled.

We need to pay attention to Ruth's answer in verse 9 to the question of who she is. "Who are you?" he asked. Ruth answered. "I am your servant Ruth. Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a guardian-redeemer of our family. (v.9)" In this verse, several things mentioned in the previous chapter are repeated and echoed. The phrase "Spread the corner of your garment over me" can be interpreted in two ways. First, at the time, 'Cover it with your clothes. Cover me with your wings' was used to mean marry me. Second, 'Cover it with your clothes' means "Cover me with your wings' in Hebrews. This expression is what Boaz said in Ruth 2:12. It is an expression used in "I came to seek protection under the wings of God." Ruth hopes that Boaz' previous prayer for her would be fulfilled through Boaz himself. This puts a pressure on him as it was the same blessing when Boaz blessed Ruth with upon her arrival. This is the central theme of the book of Ruth. God blesses his people through other people's action in mysterious way. This makes our community complete. Hesed that we do becomes a channel to deliver God's blessings to others. The central theme of the book of Ruth is that our community is made whole by the kindness (Hesed) we show to one another. "you are a guardian-redeemer of our family." These words of Ruth refer to Boaz's position as relative and "goel" mentioned last week. She is pressuring Boaz by saying that he has not only an obligation but also a responsibility to pass on Naomi's descendants. She is proposing. In Gyeongsang-do dialect, it means "nae areul nah-do (I want to give birth to your son)"

3. Boaz's response

Dear congregation – is it so strange for a woman to propose actively? I think that there is a need to break the stereotype that only men should propose. Dear women members of our congregation – I say to you – should you find a "fine man," you should make your wishes clearly known! Look at Ruth – I am certain that Boaz must have been quite flustered by Ruth's proposal. And yet Boaz demonstrates significant restraint. Ruth was a foreigner, and there was no one watching in the middle of the night. Boaz could have had his way with Ruth, and were he displeased with Ruth, he could have yelled out and woken up his servants. He could have called together the townsfolk and dishonored Ruth.

And yet, Boaz does not cross that imaginary line. He shows tremendous restraint and we can see the quality of his character here through his self control and expression of responsibility. Boaz realized that although Ruth had proposed so daringly, that she was in fact trembling with fear. And so, Boaz commends her for her bravery and honor so as to ease her heart. Indeed,

Boaz even deprecates himself so as to accomplish this, saying “This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier; you have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor.” The Hebrew word for “kindness” as it is written in the text is the word *Hesed*. In another translation the word kindness is translated as “a splendid expression of love.” (The Message). So which is the first kindness and the second kindness that Boaz is referring to? The first kindness refers to the act of *Hesed* in which Ruth went gleaning after the harvesters so as to provide for her mother-in-law. The second kindness is the act of *Hesed* in which Ruth came to the threshing floor to ask for Boaz’s hand in marriage. Boaz realized what a heavy duty and difficult task the second act of *Hesed* had been, and so commends Ruth highly for this. He realized that this act of asking for him to marry her was based on her acts of *Hesed* for her mother-in-law, and that this expression of love was worthy of high praise.

Boaz then calls Ruth a “woman of noble character,” which is represented by the Hebrew phrase “*Eshet Hail*.” Boaz calls a foreigner “*Eshet Hail*,” confirming Ruth’s acts of providing for her family and doing her utmost to meet their needs. Not only that, Boaz’s honorable character is not limited to just this; he protects Ruth’s reputation and honor by allowing her to stay with him until the morning, ensuring that she would be safe with him rather than risk having something unfortunate occur on her way back home in the middle of the night.

Not only that, Boaz is essentially promising Ruth that he would marry her. He does note that there is another guardian-redeemer who is more closely related to the family of Naomi, and thus promises that should this other relative shirk the duties of “*goel*,” then he would assume these responsibilities instead. To do this, Boaz would have to buy the land that had belonged to Elimelek – and not only that, he would become responsible for an elderly widow and take a foreigner as his wife. The story of the threshing floor does not merely represent this idealistic tale of an older man taking a younger woman to be his wife; rather, it is more representative of Boaz taking on the burdens of becoming responsible for an entire family that had fallen on hard times. This is where we realize the other face of *Hesed* – that of responsibility and duty. It is from the sense of duty towards others and a heart of caring that begets the love that is *Hesed*. The love of God is *Hesed* that gets completed as responsibilities and duties are fulfilled. The Lord made and loved man, and yet man betrayed God and ran away from Him. And so, God Himself caused His only begotten Son to be born in the body of a man in order to restore this broken world – not only that, He had this Son take up the Cross for the sins of Man. Why did God sacrifice His own Son for the Sins of Man? It is because the Lord is taking responsibility for creating Man. For example, let us say that a father entrusts his child with a computer, but the child breaks this computer. The father might become upset and angry with the child, but does not demand that the child fix the computer, because he knew that there was risk of something like this happening when the computer was entrusted to the child. The father, in short, is taking responsibility for the actions of his child. God is the same; despite knowing that Man would sin and so be separated from God, God allowed Man to have free will. And when Man inevitably brought about the breaking of this world in sin, God Himself, together with his Son, restored it. And so, we come to understand that another name for *Hesed* is Responsibility.

4. The Kindness of the Six Measures of Barley

Ruth and Boaz surely did not sleep a wink that night, and when dawn breaks, Ruth gets up hurriedly in order to leave. Boaz stops her, and fills her shawl with 6 measures of barley, and then ties it into a bundle, placing it on her – hugely generous amount. As I was preparing this sermon, I broke out in tears on reaching this portion of the passage. Perhaps you might be surprised at why I had such a reaction at this passage in particular, but I truly felt the generosity and warmth of Boaz’s heart in these verses. Isn’t he a true man? His character truly shines through here, where he sends Ruth off saying that she mustn’t return to her mother-in-law empty-handed. Don’t you think that this kind of world where we don’t let others leave empty-handed is the world that the Lord envisions for all of us? In this world where competition and hostility is the norm, shouldn’t the church become a space of radical hospitality? The six measures here represent the very heart of God, a heart where hospitality flourishes. Boaz here then becomes an agent of God’s grace in carrying out the heart of God.

I dream of a world where six measures to each other becomes the norm. This desire to not allow others to leave empty handed is the vision that restores this world. This is the heart and the love that Jesus demonstrated for us, not only saying with words that He loved us, but demonstrating His love by giving unto us His very body, torn apart; the pain of the Cross being not sufficient, He willingly suffered and allowed that His sides be pierced that we might be healed. And when He was pierced so for our iniquities, the body of Christ that had no longer blood to spill, brought forth water, showing that He truly poured out His all for us as the Good Shepherd. In John 10:10, Jesus states that I have come that they [the sheep] might have life, and have it to the full.” This heart of Christ that seeks out life to the full for others was indeed the heart of Boaz here.

5. The People of Hesed that bless and allow even the empty to prosper

The story of the threshing floor is not merely a simple love story. It is a story of duty and responsibility and honor that seeks to make the burdens of others my very own. It is the story of a man who carries into action his words of blessing. It is a story where others’ strict boundaries are never violated, and yet the measures of one’s character manifest in actions to fill others up. The book of Ruth is the beginning of how these people of Hesed open the door to the bloodline of King David, and in turn, become a part of the salvation story of the Christ to come. Dear congregation, do not be dismayed even if you feel that you have nothing to show off (like Ruth) or are too old (like Boaz). Think of a world in which a Ruth “with nothing to show” becomes an integral part of a world of Hesed. Think of a world in which we become like Boaz to share what I have with others, and our fulfillment comes when others too are fulfilled. We must not stop our radical acts of generosity that subverts spaces of hostility and turn them into spaces of hospitality. I pray that we will all come to have the heart of Boaz that sought to fill up the lives of Ruth and Naomi with six full measures. I pray for the Lord to bless this body of Christ that we might go out into the world and so bless those around us so that they too might have life to the fullest. I pray for our church’s story to become a story where we become the cause for even the empty to be filled up and so experience the fullest of lives as the body of Christ.