

Bible Scripture: Ruth 2:17-23

Title: Those who make us dream of hope / translated by Jiyun Kang

### 1. One Family

Last week, we thought about Boaz's hospitality. The most active expression of hospitality is inviting someone to our table. It means considering them as my family. The term "family" in Chinese character combines the words for "food" and "mouth." It refers to a relationship where we share meals together. While "family-Gajok in Korean" is used to emphasize blood relationships, "household-Siggu in Korean" emphasizes an intimate relationship where people share meals together, even if they are not blood-related. Sharing a meal together is very important. It can be seen as a significant symbol of important relationships in our lives. When the worship at One Heart Church ends, where do the children rush to first? The children form lines to get snacks. For these children, food they will get as a snack is much more important than the sermon. Why? Because there's nothing that brings happiness to our lives like eating delicious food. Sharing that delicious food together shows how precious the other person is to us. It seems that Jesus also understood this profound truth. That's why, at places commemorating Jesus, He told us to share bread and wine, symbolizing His body and blood, together. Sharing food together can be seen as a hospitable life following the teachings of Jesus.

### 2. Naomi's Surprise at Ruth's Gathering of Harvest

In today's reading, Naomi no longer considers her life as unhappy. That's because her daughter-in-law Ruth brought back a basket full of harvested grain. Nowadays, it's like having a fridge filled with food. Naomi's life was no longer empty. The difference in the atmosphere between Ruth 1 and Ruth 2 comes from the change in Naomi's outlook on life. In her empty heart, a small glimmer of hope began to sprout when she returned to her hometown.

Until Ruth's return from the fields, Naomi must have felt anxious. Ruth was a foreigner and a young woman. Being a foreigner not only meant that she didn't know anyone, but also that she was likely to face rejection from people. The fields were a dangerous place for a foreigner and a young woman like Ruth. As the sun set and Ruth didn't return, Naomi's heart must have been filled with anxiety. Ruth had gathered sheaves until evening and tied them to her head before heading home. By the time she arrived at the town and reached home, it was already dark. Naomi must have been quite surprised to see Ruth appearing with full of harvest on her head, as she had thought that something had happened to her.

Do you remember the term "Eshet Hail"? It translates to a capable woman, a strong woman, a wise woman. Ruth could easily carry 80kg of rice bag. One Ephah equals 23 liters, which is about 12 times the amount measured by Korea's grain units. It would be like a small sack full of grain. With this amount, two people could eat for almost two weeks. This is the kind of woman who is Eshet Hail. Naomi couldn't help but be amazed at the amount of grain brought by her foreign daughter-in-law.

Naomi must have been curious about what had happened. Knowing that all of this was due to the hospitality of Boaz, a relative of her late husband, Naomi had many thoughts. She first blesses Boaz and then begins to explain to her daughter-in-law Ruth who Boaz is.

### 3. Boaz who chose to be the goel

The description of Boaz by Naomi can be summarized in two aspects. First, he is consistently compassionate towards Naomi's family. Second, he is the one who will redeem the inheritance. Let's look at the meaning of these two descriptions one by one.

Firstly, Boaz is introduced as a person who consistently shows mercy to Naomi's family. In our language, it is translated as "showing mercy," but in Hebrew, it is expressed as "hesed." What does "hesed" mean? It refers to acts of faithfulness or mercy performed by parties in a covenantal relationship. Naomi praises Boaz, saying, "He has not stopped showing hesed to the living and the dead," referring to her late husband and sons, "and now he is also showing hesed to us."

I have mentioned before that "hesed" is not just minor kindness, but mercy that is related to life itself. Boaz's hesed was related to Ruth and Naomi's survival. In other words, if Boaz did not show hesed, the two women would face significant difficulties in their survival. We can understand why Boaz is in a position related to their survival when Naomi explains the second fact to Ruth.

Naomi introduces Boaz to Ruth as the one who will "redeem the inheritance" in her household. The term "redeem the inheritance" may sound unfamiliar to you. This is a translation of the Hebrew word "goel." The Hebrew word "goel" comes from the verb "ga'al," which means "to deliver," "to redeem," or "to avenge." The Israelites were a family or clan community. It was a community where people with the same bloodline lived together, taking care of each other's lives. The means of sustaining this community was "land." It means a community of destiny that survives by sharing together the harvest from the land. However, as one lives, debts can accumulate, and situations may arise where one has to sell the land or even sell one's life. In such cases, relatives do not simply stand by; they step in to rescue the person. How can they rescue? By buying the land or paying the life's value and returning the person's land to them. Let's give an example. This act of a close relative rescuing someone's land that was in debt is called "redeeming the inheritance." And the close relative in this position of redeeming the inheritance was called "goel." Only then could Ruth understand the hospitality and kindness of Boaz. She might have thought, "Ah, this elderly gentleman Boaz is our close relative. He is the goel who performed the proper hesed for us."

We must understand that this Old Testament concept of goel developed into the salvation of Jesus Christ on the cross for us. Jesus Christ became the goel to redeem our inheritance through His crucifixion. We were trapped in sin, offering our lives as collateral, and Jesus could not simply watch us suffer. This was because Jesus was in the position of a very close relative who is the goel for us. Jesus paid our life's value with His own death on the cross and restored life to us. The crucifixion of Jesus was indeed the act of hesed, just as the concept of goel from the Old Testament. Jesus, as our goel, personally demonstrated covenantal faithfulness on the cross.

### 4. From a Journey of Death to a Journey of Life

The faint smile reappeared in Naomi's life because of the hope budding in her heart. This hope was ignited by Boaz, the kinsman-redeemer of her family, showing hesed, a covenantal faithfulness and mercy towards them. In verse 20, the Revised New Standard Korean version (RNSK) Bible translates it as "consistently," but its original meaning is "he did not give up showing hesed." The word "give up" or "leave" used in Ruth 1:16 and Ruth 2:11 is used once again here. Just as Ruth did not give up on her mother-in-law by leaving her biological mother and father, Boaz also did not give up showing hesed to the two women, emphasizing his commitment.

Though God gave abundance to the people of Judah, it did not directly benefit Ruth and Naomi. However, through Boaz, God's grace was manifested to them. Boaz provided them with food as a way for God to care for the returning widows. Here, we realize a surprising truth: God's love and faithfulness take shape in our lives through human actions.

In other words, it is difficult to feel God's love before human actions take place. Even though Naomi and Ruth returned upon hearing the news of God's grace towards Judah, they did not experience it concretely until Boaz showed hesed to them. It was through Boaz's concrete actions that Naomi and Ruth began to dream again. Naomi started to think that her life might not be as bitter as she thought. She gained the power to imagine that her life could bloom anew if Boaz fulfilled his role as the goel. It was a moment when the journey of death turned into a journey of life.

Our lives become desperate and difficult when we cannot see the future ahead. In situations where we cannot see even an inch ahead, we can only fall into fear and despair. Without prospects, we fall into despair. Naomi's despair was precisely that. She thought it was all over for her because she couldn't find any help, and her future was uncertain. But through the hesed of one man, she began to imagine that new things could happen in her life.

Last year, around this time before I moved to Rochester, I felt like I was in a situation similar to Naomi's. My life was in a state of uncertainty, and I couldn't see how it would unfold. It was like walking in thick fog, a frustrating situation. But after coming to Rochester, all of you showed hesed to me with love and mercy. Experiencing the love of the saints and neighbors, I began to have a prospect on my life and ministry. I want to express my sincere gratitude to all the members of Dahana Church who provided a home for those who had nowhere to lean on and nowhere to settle.

## 5. A Life of Unyielding Hesed

Among you, there may still be people facing an uncertain future and unable to see any prospects. The fact that we are a community means that we should be a place of rest for each other. It means offering our space to those who need a place to settle. We should give strength and courage to those who are struggling and have nowhere to lean on. God's love and mercy take shape and become tangible through people. Love without action is just a resounding gong. Love is realized through action and sincerity. Let us not forget that the love we show in truth can sprout hope in someone's heart, enabling them to imagine anew. Helping others to rise up can be a way to overcome our own despair. There's a saying, "Washing others' hands cleanses one's own hands." One way to conquer our despairing life is to be with those who are more challenged than ourselves and help them. This was the method Ruth and Naomi chose.

A life of consistently showing hesed, that should be our new goal in life. A life that doesn't give up showing hesed. In sports, they talk about consistency being the key to proficiency. In tennis, the difference between a professional and an amateur lies in their ability to hit consistent shots. I think the same applies to our faith. A mature person is someone who can consistently practice love and mercy under any circumstances and conditions. Like athletes, we too should train ourselves to consistently show hesed. A life that doesn't give up on hesed. In your homes, workplaces, and relationships with neighbors, train yourself to show hesed consistently. I bless you to be the ones who help many neighbors find hope in their despair and restore their outlook on life. May you awaken in many people the realization that, "Ah, God is alive, and my life is still worth living!."