

The Story So Far...

- Elimelech & Naomi, sons Mahlon and Chilion, left Bethlehem in Judah for Moab because of famine.
 - Mahlon married Ruth, Chilion married Orpah, Moabite girls.
 - men all die
 - Naomi decides to return to Bethlehem, and the girls come with her.
 - *Orpah turns back, when Naomi suggests she will be better off in Moab.*
 - but Ruth identifies herself wholly with Naomi, her people and, critically, her God
 - Naomi regards her life as bitter and empty as she returns to Bethlehem.
 - Ruth goes out into the fields, gleaning, to support herself and Naomi.
 - "Happens" to end up in Boaz's field, who treats Ruth kindly, generously and protects her....

The Kinsman-Redeemer

From Another World

- Have you ever tried to explain something that is very familiar and straightforward to you to someone of a different generation?
 - maybe for those of you who are older, its things about day-to-day life, what the kitchen was like when you grew up, outside toilets, even life before TV!
 - in the other direction, it can be sometimes be things to do with technology, computers, how to programme the Video Recorder, get text messages on a mobile phone, work a Palm...!
- This story is like that - *only a hundred times worse!*
- Naomi takes the initiative.
- Boaz is a a close relative - indeed he identifies himself as a close enough relative to serve as "kinsman-redeemer".
- Naomi sends Ruth out to approach Boaz - in a fairly unique way!
 - dresses up; notes where he goes to sleep (guarding barley);
 - lies down at his feet (submissive);
 - when he wakes, throws herself on his mercy and asks for his full protection;
 - *"will you spread your skirt over me"*
 - possibly implying marriage (GNB "so please marry me" is a bit direct!).
- Boaz responds positively:
 - not only will he act as the kinsman redeemer, doing his duty...
 - but acts generously, with care, compassion, gentleness - gives barley as a gift, allows her to stay with him during night (safe), yet makes sure she is home at dawn (protecting her from scandal);
 - note his determination - Naomi knew he'd see it through once started.

The Kinsman-Redeemer

- Very, very peculiar to our ears!
- So much of the cultural context has changed, so little that we understand!
 - we are urban, they were rural
 - we use money, they probably bartered for most things
 - we have jobs, they grew their own food - broadly subsistence farming
 - we value independence and self-sufficiency, they valued inter-dependence and community
 - family to us is less all encompassing and essential for identity than it was for them
- All of that makes it difficult to really pick up on what we can learn beyond the "niceness" of a story with a happy ending!
- Perhaps the strangest thing about this story lies at its heart:
 - why did Naomi suggest Ruth approached Boaz in this strange way?
 - why did Boaz respond in the way that he did?

- And the answer is... "GOEL"!
- Hebrew word for which there is no direct equivalent in English!
- Nearest we can come is: **kinsman-redeemer**:
 - a close relative (**kinsman**) who is a redeemer;
 - a protector whose **duty** it was, in certain circumstances, to act as "redeemer" in situations of family need.
 - mostly involved situations of money, debt and slavery;
 - if someone got into financial difficulty, they might first sell land to pay off debts, but would then only be able to get casual labour at certain times of the year; heading towards destitution.... might result in literal slavery, or just the "slavery" of unrepayable debts
 - the kinsman-redeemer would **buy back** the family member who would otherwise have gone into slavery; would maybe get use of that land, but title would remain for line of original owner;
 - could encompass also something called "levirate marriage" - where a brother dying left a widow and no son to take on the family name and land. It became the brother's duty to marry his brother's widow and father children by her, **so that his name would not die**.
- Sometimes in families we have things that become certain people's responsibilities:
 - when I was growing up, for instance, my Dad would always clean shoes on a Sunday morning before church...
 - or the expectation that a bride's father will normally walk with her up the aisle...
- This goel/kinsman-redeemer role was a bigger version of that kind of thing:
 - a commonly accepted role, that could be taken up or ignored.
 - and Naomi and Ruth are essentially encouraging Boaz to act as their redeemer

God as Kinsman Redeemer

- My guess is that you are probably still left wondering: "SO WHAT?"
 - it's a nice story, its heading towards a happy ending, wish I'd met this Boaz guy, **but what relevance does it have for us today?**
- One main thing:
 - though not explicit in this passage, in several other places one of the pictures the Bible uses to describe God, his character and the way he acts, is as a "Goel".
- We will be reasonably familiar with picturing him as **king**, or as **judge**, or even **servant**...
 - ... God is a bit like each of these, we can learn about him by learning about these.
- In the same kind of way, **God is Goel** - kinsman redeemer, eg:
- **READ: Exodus 6:6-8**
- (Exodus 6:6-8) *"Therefore, say to the Israelites: 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the LORD.'"*
- See also many passages Isaiah 40-55, or Jeremiah, or several of the Psalmists.
- While those of Ruth's generation could have comprehended something of **God as Goel**, we have a much greater understanding:
 - for while Naomi and Boaz and Ruth could look back to God redeeming his people from Egypt, identifying himself with them, they hadn't seen Jesus
 - they hadn't seen the one who is God, but who so identified himself with humanity that he took on frail flesh, became a baby in a stable
 - they hadn't seen Him, because he was to be born many, many generations later, a descendant of Boaz and Ruth the Moabitess!
 - they hadn't seen him buy back our freedom by his incredible sacrifice on the

- Cross, paying the whole cost of our redemption Himself
- they hadn't seen Him make us part of his family, welcoming us as his brothers and sisters, children of God
 - they hadn't seen Jesus open the door to an inheritance so vast, so mind-blowing that only eternity itself will see us enter into it!
- As Boaz did, God acts with love and mercy, a deep concern for his people.
 - Boaz fore-shadows for us the work of Christ - not only ancestor, also fore-runner!
 - Christ our Goel, like Boaz for Ruth, is related to us, able and willing to redeem - and that is surely cause for great rejoicing!

Coming to our Goel

- Let us learn, then, to approach our **Goel**, our kinsman redeemer, with the same attitude that Ruth took:
 - she came **submissive**, not demanding her rights, her own way, but submitting to his initiative;
 - she came **empty handed**, nothing with her that would merit Boaz's attention, no tangible benefit for him;
 - and she came in **trust**, indeed exposing herself to the risk on being rejected, to the risk of being taken advantage of
- As we come to Jesus:
 - let us come **submissive** to his will, willing to let him rule our lives;
 - let us come **empty handed**, knowing that none of our goodness, none of our respectability, nothing we have counts for anything;
 - and let us come in **trust**, willing to take the risk of entrusting ourselves to this other, this Jesus!