

**SERMON – 8/2/26**  
**'Providence'**

Ruth 4:11-22

"The women said to Naomi, "Praise the LORD! He has given you a grandson today to take care of you. May the boy become famous in Israel! Your daughter-in-law loves you, and has done more for you than seven sons. And now she has given you a grandson, who will bring new life to you and give you security in your old age." Naomi took the child, held him close, and took care of him." (Ruth 4:14-16)

I hope that you have enjoyed reading through this Book of Ruth over the last few weeks, and although it has perhaps required a little bit of stretching to get your head round some of the more obscure provisions of the Law of Moses that are worked out in the story, I hope that seeing them worked out in a story of very human struggles that we can all relate to has helped to see the intention of God in offering a better way than that often worked out by human beings to deal with social problems such as untimely bereavement and the economic hardship that went along with it, the added difficulties faced by those crossing cultural boundaries as refugees and the critical risk of impoverishment faced by widows in ancient times (and still in many societies today). There is a challenge to us in the Church in our time to learn the ways of God's Kingdom not in some ethereal sense but in a roll-up-your-sleeves-and-help way where people like Naomi and Ruth whom we have met in this Book exist right here in our own community and need the support of the people of God in the face of godly individuals like Boaz and the wider circle of leaders and ordinary folk like you and me.

I hope that you have been challenged in reading this story to reach out to people who may be struggling with homelessness or with a sense of rootlessness. I hope that you have been challenged to put the provisions of God's Word into practice not in a ritualistic way by putting your offering in the plate on a Sunday nor even in a legalistic way by giving to charity out of a sense of duty but by going the extra mile, by responding in grace to the grace that we have each been shown by God, freely giving as we

have all freely received in our own need. I hope that you have even taken on board what we were saying last week about our human need of redemption, more than just the needs that are partially supplied by the Welfare State to which we all contribute through our taxes but that we as followers of Christ know can only be fully and spiritually met by the gift of life in all its fulness that is offered us from the Cross by Jesus the ultimate Redeemer of the world.

In the short closing section of Ruth that we have read this morning the story reaches its fulfilment not only for Naomi and Ruth as we have followed their difficulties from Moab to Bethlehem but also as it points forward into the big story of God's purposes for the world. Ruth and Boaz are married and they are blessed with the gift of a child. Granny Naomi finally has something to smile about and it looks like everyone lives happily ever after. But this is much more than a fairy story, because if you take on board the closing verses of the book we discover that this child of a Moabite refugee and a gracious Israelite grows up to father a son by the name of Jesse whom we will encounter later in the unfolding story when the prophet Samuel comes looking amongst Jesse's sons for the one whom God has prepared to be King, the shepherd boy, David in whose line Jesus will ultimately come.

As a bit of an aside you may be familiar with the genealogy that appears at the opening of Matthew's Gospel. Historically these lists of ancestors would usually only contain the names of the male line, but the names of four women appear in the ancestry of Jesus. One of course is Mary, Jesus' own mother, but the other three actually connect to people mentioned in the book of Ruth. One is Ruth herself and it's notable that the ancestry of the Messiah contains the name of someone from outwith the people of Israel. The second is Rahab, the prostitute in Jericho who hid the Israelite spies and played such an important part in the Fall of Jericho and the conquest of the Promised Land. This Rahab, we are told, is actually the mother of Boaz who plays such a crucial role in this story. And the final woman, although her name is not actually given, is Bathsheba the wife of Uriah the Hittite with whom King David would commit adultery.

I'd like to draw out a couple of themes from what we have read this morning. We'll come back in a moment to the place that this story of Ruth has in the big unfolding picture of the purposes of God in the coming of the Messiah but alongside that deeply spiritual thread lies a very human one that I think has got something to say to each one of us.

There is nothing more basically human than family and as this story of Ruth reaches its climax it's no surprise to us that the tale concludes with the marriage of Ruth and Boaz and the birth of a child. You can almost hear the film score swelling as the adoring parents gaze down at the bundle of flesh in their arms. But again, just as this is not just a fairy story, nor is it a Hollywood blockbuster, and it's important to highlight that there are also some other aspects to the existence of human families.

Last week we read about Boaz taking the matter of the need to support the widows Naomi and Ruth to the town elders gathered at the city gate and just as they witness Boaz's willingness to buy the ancestral land of Naomi's late husband and to take on responsibility for Kilion's widow, Ruth, we also see them here asking God's blessing on their union and seeking material prosperity for them as a couple. We also read here about the women of the community celebrating the birth of the baby, Obed, rejoicing at the blessing he will bring to his grandmother who had returned to Bethlehem the previous year so full of bitterness at the misfortune that had befallen her, and praising Ruth for having done more for Naomi than seven sons. In our society, perhaps increasingly, we tend to privatise family life and diminish the role for the 'whole village' in the raising of children and the supporting of family units and maybe we have something to learn from this story about the kind of intergenerational support structures that we see being worked out in this story.

One of the blessings we as a church family actually have to offer to one another is the support and encouragement that I see being worked out here Sunday by Sunday and week by week too as we interact with one another. I see older people here whose families live in other parts of the country or even in other countries chatting away after the service to younger folk whose older relatives they don't often get to see for the same reason. Church

is one of the few places where all generations regularly gather. Here, to take a phrase from the Psalms, 'the lonely are set in families' as the single and the married and the same-sex attracted and the widowed and the divorced engage with one another, as the bereaved and those who are dealing with ill-health find comfort and support through the good wishes and practical help of those who are dealing with altogether different challenges such as the pain and grief of childlessness or the stresses of coping with toddlers or teenagers or unemployment or mental illness and in fact give as much help as they receive in the by-going. My friends, let's celebrate what God does among us in the utterly ordinary interactions of our Christian fellowship because in actual fact it is something that a sometimes struggling world has to learn from us. Of course we don't always get it right - sometimes we say the wrong thing; sometimes we don't allow others in to help; sometimes we think that our experience is more important than someone else's. But sometimes we discover that the touch on the arm or the arm on the shoulder or the full blown hug or the bunch of flowers or the jar of jam or the pot of soup says more than any sermon could about what it means to belong to the Body of Christ and to experience that when one suffers all suffer but also that when one has cause for rejoicing there is cause for all to rejoice.

Naomi, who once had been bitter and broken, took the child and held him close, and took care of him. Perhaps there is something unremarkable but deeply human that you can do today, this week, that will be a blessing to someone else in the fellowship or in your own family or in the wider community and that God will use for healing or restoring or even in the working out of His eternal purposes in ways that maybe only posterity will recognise. Maybe another Book of Ruth is being written in the life of someone here at the moment. In the same way as from the line of Ruth and Boaz King David was born and in the fulness of the times the Saviour came, the finger of God is writing history in and through each one of us and bringing fulfilment to the promises of the Kingdom here in Kinross-shire just as in Moab and Bethlehem of old. What is God asking of you and me today, I wonder, and what will Christ accomplish if we are faithful and obedient to His call?