

Psalm 127

Unless the Lord builds the house,
the builders labour in vain.

Unless the Lord watches over the city,
the guards stand watch in vain.

In vain you rise early
and stay up late,
**toiling for food to eat –
for he grants sleep to those he loves.**

Children are a heritage from the Lord,
offspring a reward from him.

Like arrows in the hands of a warrior
are children born in one's youth.

Blessed is the man
whose quiver is full of them.

**They will not be put to shame
when they contend with their opponents in court.**

Ruth 3:14-4:17

So Ruth lay at Boaz's feet until morning, but got up before anyone could be recognised; for he said, 'No one must know that a woman came to the threshing-floor. Bring me the shawl you are wearing and hold it out.' He poured into it six measures of barley and placed the bundle on her. Then Boaz went back to town.

When Ruth came to Naomi she asked, 'How did it go, my daughter?' She told Naomi everything Boaz had done for her and added, 'He gave me these six measures of barley, saying, "Don't go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed."' Then Naomi said, 'Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today.'

No sooner had Boaz gone up to the town gate than the next-of-kin he had mentioned came along. Boaz said, 'Come over here, my friend, and sit down.' So he went over and sat down. Boaz took ten of the elders of the town and said, 'Sit here,' and they did so. Then he said to the next-of-kin, 'Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our relative Elimelech. I thought I should bring the matter to your attention and suggest that you buy it in the presence of these seated here and in the presence of the elders. If you will redeem it, do so. But if you will not, tell me, so I will know. For no one has the right to do it except you, and I am next in line.'

'I will redeem it,' he said. Then Boaz said, 'On the day you buy the land from Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the dead man's widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property.' At this, the next-of-kin said, 'Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it. ... Buy it yourself.'

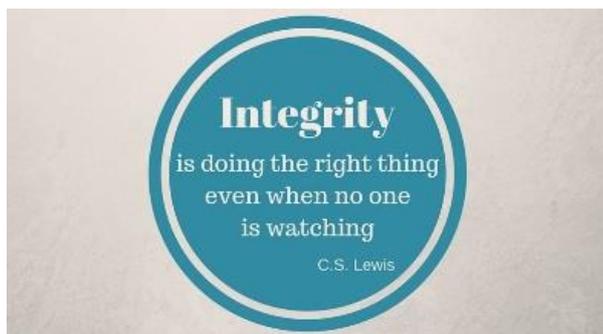
Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, 'Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelech, Chilion and Mahlon. In addition, Ruth the Moabite, Mahlon's widow, becomes my wife, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from his home town. Today you are witnesses!' Then the elders and all the people at the gate said, 'We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the family of Israel. May you

have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. Through the children the Lord gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah.'

So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When he made love to her, the Lord enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. The women said to Naomi: 'Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth.'

Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him. The women living there said, 'Naomi has a son!' And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

MESSAGE Living with integrity



Integrity and trust are key elements for any relationship – whether for friendship, marriage or in public life. The word **integrity** comes from the Latin **integer** meaning whole or undivided. So in mathematics, an integer is a whole number without any fraction. If a person lives with integrity there is a wholeness – their words and actions match – they do what they say. We might call them **authentic** or

honest.

The Bible uses words like **straight** and **whole** to describe such people.

I wonder if you know people who live like this?

Were your parents like this, or your teachers, your friends?

The opposite of integrity is **deceit**, **dishonesty** and **hypocrisy** where people say one thing but do another, make promises but don't fulfil them. Sadly, many public figures live just like this – especially politicians and media personalities.

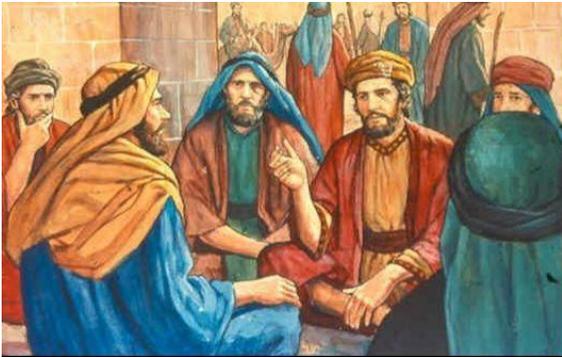


Our Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, has been under the microscope recently accused of lying and being slippery with the truth. He denies it of course, but there have been too many examples – not just with French submarine deals – where he says the right words but acts differently – like the time he put his arm around then Prime Minister Turnbull and exclaimed 'This is my leader and I'm ambitious for him!' – while all the while plotting his own

rise to the top job two days later. The latest example of Morrison's deceit is his climate change policy that requires nothing of anybody while firmly supporting the status quo for the fossil fuel industry and yet which will, miraculously, reduce Australia's carbon emissions to nearly zero by 2050. These words lack authenticity and integrity when not matched with action.

Which brings us to the concluding parts of the story of Ruth and Boaz.

Last week, Ruth had followed the shrewd and bold advice of her mother-in-law Naomi and ventured down to the threshing floor at night and had challenged Boaz to act as next-of-kin for herself and Naomi. After an initial shock, Boaz tells Ruth that he will do all that she asks and will take up the matter that very day.



Boaz proves to be a person of integrity and does take up the matter directly.

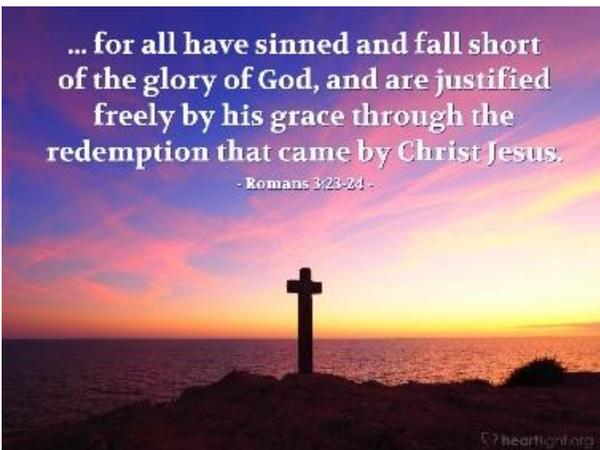
He is prepared to act as a kinsman-redeemer and offers to buy the land belonging to Naomi's husband Elimelech.

It sounds a little strange to our ears that this transaction will result in him also 'acquiring' Ruth – almost as if she is another piece of property to be purchased. But by

agreeing to marry Ruth, any children they have will inherit the land that belonged to Elimelech.

As a person of integrity, however, Boaz is aware that there is another person who is more closely related to Naomi who must get first option. When he refuses, Boaz is able to complete the transaction and acquires both the land and Ruth as his wife. And so Naomi and Ruth now have a secure future, gifted to them by Boaz who has effectively 'redeemed' them from poverty and a hopeless future. **It's the happy ending we were hoping for!**

In the OT, Yahweh is named several times as the **Redeemer of Israel**, as Yahweh acts to redeem or free Israel from slavery – first in Egypt and later in Babylon.



This same imagery flows into the NT with the death of Jesus on the cross interpreted as an act of redemption, this time for the whole of humanity who were enslaved by sin and death but have now been freed to live a holy life and to enjoy this life forever. In each case the freedom has been won on behalf of the ones who were powerless to act on their own behalf. So in some ways, the actions of Boaz prefigure the actions of Jesus.

While Boaz has acted with integrity, even more praise is bestowed on Ruth for her faithfulness and loyalty. The people of Bethlehem fully embrace Ruth and pray that she bring blessing and prosperity to their community just as **Leah** and **Rachel** did in building up the household of Israel through Jacob, and also like **Tamar** who bore a son to Judah, one of Jacob's children.



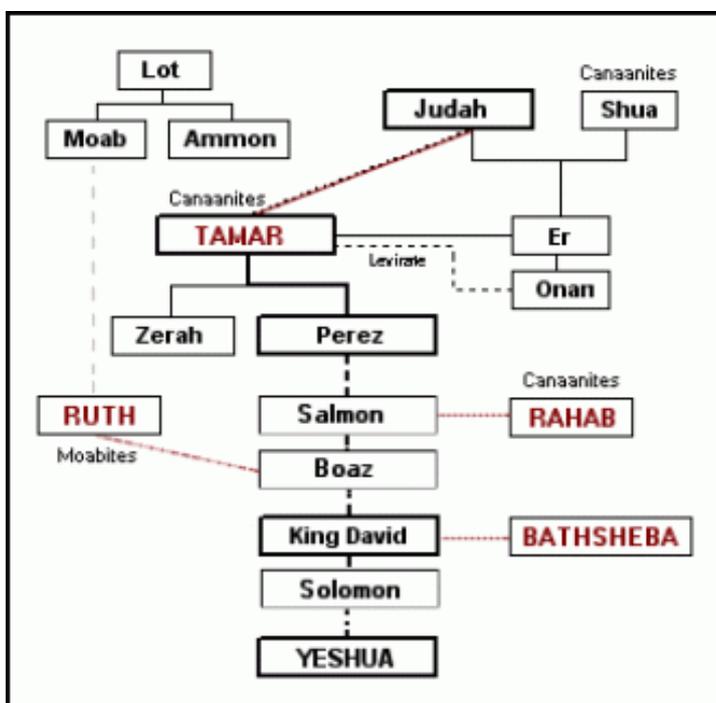
All three of these women were foreigners, like Ruth. When Ruth conceives and gives birth to a son, the women praise Ruth for her love and faithfulness to Naomi that makes her worth more than seven sons. This is high praise indeed!

The son is named Obed who becomes the father of Jesse who becomes the father of David, Israel's most famous king. So in the genealogy of David, **Ruth the Moabite is David's great grandmother.**

Ruth also appears in the genealogy of Jesus in the opening chapter of Matthew's Gospel along with other significant women – Tamar, Rahab and Bathsheba – all of them foreigners and all part of the human ancestry of Jesus the Messiah.

**Salmon became the father of Boaz by Rahab [from Jericho].
Boaz became the father of Obed by Ruth [from Moab].
Obed became the father of Jesse. Jesse became the father of King David.**

*Matthew 1:5-6
talktotheword.com*



One wonders whether this detail about foreign wives being accepted into the honour roll of some of Israel's most famous leaders is the reason why the book of Ruth was included in the Hebrew Scriptures. Sure, it's a beautiful short story about faithfulness and courage and integrity, but there are also bigger questions that sit behind the story.



I want to briefly comment on two of them.

The first is our attitude – and God's attitude – towards those we regard as foreigners.

Do we welcome them with open arms or do we ignore them or fear them?

Will they take our jobs or will they spur on the economy?

Israel's Scriptures are divided on this issue.

The Law says Israel is to love foreigners because they were once foreigners in Egypt ... yet in many places Israel is warned about the dangers of following the practices of surrounding nations and their gods.

In some books such as Ezra, the people are ordered to cast off their foreign wives and only marry fellow Israelites.

There have been similar arguments through church history on the dangers and threat of non-believing spouses.

But the story of David is different. He is forced to flee Israel due to the jealousy and rage of King Saul and lives for many years as a refugee. David gathers around him a core of mercenary soldiers who come from neighbouring lands. He himself marries a number of foreign women. ... and God blesses David's life and he eventually rules over Israel for forty years ... all of which suggests that God accepts these foreigners into Israel. Through them God is building up the house of Israel into a nation and a kingdom.

1st	Michal	1 Samuel 18:27
2nd	Abigail	1 Samuel 25:42
3rd	Ahinoam	1 Samuel 25:43
4th	Maaca	2 Samuel 3:3
5th	Haggith	2 Samuel 3:4
6th	Abital	2 Samuel 3:4
7th	Eglah	2 Samuel 3:5
8th	Bathsheba	2 Samuel 12:24
Others	Concubines	1 Chronicles 3:9

The book of Ruth – with its close link to King David – provides a hopeful voice in the debate about foreigners. It suggests how we could treat foreigners and refugees living in our midst and the blessing they may bring us.

It further suggests that God welcomes them – as did Jesus – and so should we.

A second question that lies behind the story of Ruth is how God is active in the world. In the famous headline stories of the Bible, God acts openly and decisively. Yet for most people of faith, for most of the time, God's influence is more hidden.

God's grace and love are at work but it's sometimes hard to see.

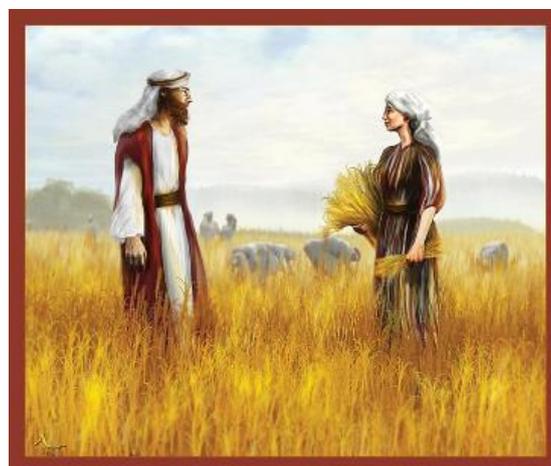
In this story, Ruth *happens* to go to the field of Boaz ... who *happens* to be a close relative of Naomi ... but this guiding hand of God's unseen grace doesn't absolve them of responsibility to think, speak and take responsibility for their actions.

Naomi had to plan ...

Ruth had to have courage to act ...

and Boaz had to deliver on his promises.

Grace and blessing come to each of them – and to the wider community of Bethlehem and eventually to the nation of Israel.



There are ripples of grace that spread out from the story of Ruth that influence our attitudes towards God and towards foreigners and that nudge us to live lives of courage, faithfulness and integrity. God has promised to always be with us but our responsibility is to live authentic and undivided lives where our actions match our words and our beliefs.