



Finding Hope
Finding Home

Part of Bible Month 2020

Ruth 2: Survival Seeking Hope

by Rev Dan Balsdon, Sunday 14th June 2020 | read online at www.revdanbalsdon.com

If you've watched the film Titanic, you will probably remember scene where Jack is handcuffed to a frame of the ship with water rising around him. The music builds, the water rises, and as hard as he tries Jack cannot get himself free and all hope appears to be lost...but then Rose appears, and despite the risk to her own survival as well as the survival of Jack, she will not give up. Axe in hand she aims, strikes and they are free. The danger is not over, but there is hope, they can now seek safety.

Ruth 2 opens with Ruth and Naomi without anyone to provide for them, so Ruth decides she must act. With Naomi's permission she heads out to gather the leftover grain from the harvest fields.

And just by chance, just like in any good soap opera the newcomer turns out to be related to someone else, Ruth ends up gleaning in a field owned by Boaz, a relative of Elimelech – Naomi's late husband. What are the chances!?!

Now we need to remember Ruth was a Moabite in an Israelite world. An outsider, foreigner, minority. She was vulnerable in so many ways. She had little status in the community, except perhaps that achieved through her relationship with Naomi. She had little right to be out gathering grain in the field, so she hangs behind the others in the fields, ensuring she takes nothing that others have the right and privilege to take.

Ruth may have taken action to seek survival, but she refrains from pushing the cultural boundary limits too far...

But Boaz, on learning Ruth is with Naomi, goes to Ruth and tells her – go nowhere else, you can gather in my fields. And don't hang back, you can keep close to the others – and my men will leave you alone. (IE – they will not take advantage of your vulnerability, they will not molest or rape you). Let's not beat around the bush – that's the reality of just some of the vulnerabilities Ruth is facing.

Yet despite the vulnerabilities, she stepped out for survival, and Boaz welcomes her. And not only that, he tells her to drink from the water that is there for his staff. Not only does Boaz provide, he offers hospitality beyond expectation.

We live in a time where our own vulnerability has changed or has been intensified. We also live in a time when light is being shone on the systemic and institutional vulnerabilities society forces upon minorities, including black and minority ethnic people.

The vulnerability we see Ruth facing, and Boaz's response, might offer us a challenge in how we approach issues of difference – be it race or ethnicity, or opinions and preferences.

In this episode of the story, we can see how God begins to provide not only means of survival, but hope and home for Ruth and Naomi. God puts Boaz in the right place at the right time to use his power and privilege, and working through Ruth's own determination, brings provision for the future.

Ruth seeks survival, and Boaz sees Ruth. Not Ruth the Moabite, but Ruth the human being. Boaz makes space not simply for her survival, but gives her some sense of equality with his staff, his people. We might say, invites her to be part of the community – to begin to find a home. And in doing so, Ruth's survival seeks, and finds, hope.

One of ways this chapter might speak to us today is to challenge us in recognising the potential of the power of God, and the power of God's Spirit within us.

As we see in Ruth's character, we have power to seek hope. God's Spirit in us calls us to challenge cultural boundaries, to stand up against those things that oppress us and threaten our survival and identity as human beings.

As we see in the character of Boaz, we also possess power and privilege ourselves, and indeed responsibility as God's people, filled with God's Spirit, to contribute towards the survival and seeking of hope and home of our fellow human beings.

I encourage you to reflect this week...

How may God's Spirit be challenging you to use your power or privilege? For self, for others, for God?

God Bless you all today with the power and hope God's Spirit has already placed within you.

Reflect

How do we welcome strangers, especially those who are vulnerable such as seasonal workers, undocumented migrants, those on benefits?

How do we respond to the recent demonstrations seeking to bring attention issues of institutional racism and discrimination?