



Finding Hope
Finding Home

Part of Bible Month 2020

Ruth 4: Finding Home

by Rev Dan Balsdon, Sunday 28th June 2020 | read online at www.revdanbalsdon.com

Growing up one of my favourite films was Toy Story.

I loved the idea that my toys lived in a world of their own every time I left the room.

In the first film, Buzz is a new toy who enters Andy's toybox community as an outsider.

Buzz believes he is a real space ranger, not a toy, and believes he can fly.

Throughout the film Buzz is on a journey of discovering who he really is,

while the rest of the toys are on their own journey of learning to welcome difference into their community.

In Ruth 3, we found Ruth visiting Boaz at night, hoping he would give her a home, long term security and survival for her and Naomi. Naomi and Ruth had lost much, their husbands, their security, safety. They were grieving. They were struggling for hope. The nature of the culture of the day meant they were vulnerable to the nth degree.

But Boaz is not the immediate next-of-kin. There is someone else who is a closer kinsman, and in keeping with the culture, has first rights to act as next-of-kin to Naomi and Ruth.

At the start of Ruth 4, Boaz takes centre stage. It's his turn to take action.

he speaks to the closer next-of-kin who does have first rights to act.

Now Boaz, perhaps, pulls a bit of a sly move here. I think as readers of the story we're encouraged to see Boaz in a positive light, but it could also be said he's possibly a bit manipulative here, or self-seeking.

Maybe he really did like Ruth and wanted her to be his wife, and twisted things in his favour.

Or maybe he saw an opportunity to obtain land and so did what he had to do to get it.

So Boaz meets this closer next-of-kin, at the city gates, in public, with 10 of the city elders with them. He says to this man, - *"hey, you know Naomi, she's back, and she's selling the land that belonging to our kinsman, Elimelech. So, I thought I'd tell you about it here and now in front of all these witnesses. If you will redeem it, do, but if not, tell me and I will redeem it."*

The unexpected discovery that Naomi own's some land is a surprise, it was Elimelech's, perhaps left during the famine and never returned to. The fact she's selling the land is probably a sign

that Naomi has lost all other hope, and selling the land, that would, one would think, offer long-term fruitfulness, is the only way for her to survive in the short term.

The man says to Boaz “yes – I will redeem it.”. Then Boaz goes on, and claims that by taking the land, he must also take Ruth, the Moabite, and maintain the dead man’s name. This would mean any children they had would be named for Ruth’s dead husband... and that they would, in the end, inherit the land.

The man says – I can’t redeem, it will; damage my own inheritance. You redeem it. Does Boaz use Ruth’s foreigner status to his advantage? Or does he use this to overcome the fact that there was a prohibition against marrying a foreigner – because by becoming next-of-kin he can legal marry Ruth despite that.

They have a son, Obed, who Naomi cares for – in some ways he becomes a son to Ruth, Boaz and Naomi – Obed becomes symbol of the restoration of hope – because there can now be descendants. No longer is Ruth an outsider, she’s found hope. She’s found home. And not just with Boaz, but with the community.

Ruth and Boaz marry, all the people and elders are at the marriage, and bless Ruth - ‘may she build up the house of Israel’ they say (Ruth 4:11). Ruth is now seen as a member of the Israelite community.

And that’s where Buzz and Toy Story come in. In life we often encounter people who are strangers to us. People different from ourselves.

As Churches - Christian communities, I believe God call us to be a community that reaches out in love to all. To welcome in the name of Christ those we perceive to be, and not be, like us. Cowboys or Space Rangers. Slinky Dogs or Potato heads. Barbie dolls or dinosaurs.

To help each other discover who we are – made in the image of God – to work out if we are real or just a toy, if we can fly, or fall with style (do watch Toy Story if you don’t understand the references!).

To make space for all people to find hope, through faith in the God who is a God for all.
To discover that the community of faith is the place in which all people, no matter background or belief or race or gender or sexuality or ethnicity or self-confidence – **can find home and belong.**

Church - God’s challenge to us, regardless of lockdown, regardless of what gathered community is going to look like in the coming weeks and months, is to make sure that this call from God is the reality found among us.

A community of hope.
A community that points to the home that can be found when we discover we belong to God.
A community that reaches in love to all..

God works through the unexpected. God works through the stranger.
We are never without Hope. In God, we find home.