The Book of Ruth - Session 3

**First Thoughts**

Ever been in a situation where you’ve felt stuck – and it really matters? You just can’t get the right medical treatment for your son, or you can’t make ends meet, or you keep on going for interviews and can’t get a job. The system ought to work but it isn’t working for you. What options are open to you?

Boaz’s generous change to his harvesting practice certainly ensured that Naomi and Ruth would have had enough to eat day by day, and enough to keep them going for a while once the harvest was over. However, it was far from providing any kind of longer-term security for the widows – Ruth remains unmarried, and there is no one to preserve Elimelek’s name. Yes, the covenant God of Israel had repeatedly stated his concern for the widow and the poor in general (Leviticus 25:35), but had the covenant community taken any significant steps to reflect that concern? At this point the future doesn’t look particularly bright for Naomi and Ruth.

What options do these vulnerable women have? What options do oppressed, systematically disadvantaged women have when life-threatening poverty strikes? Not only in low-income countries but in Europe? Crime? Prostitution? Today in Britain there are some 64,000 female prostitutes, 41% from overseas. Desperate times may require desperate measures, but desperate measures usually come with dangerous risks.

**Read Ruth 3**

**Focus on the Theme**

1. Think about a time when you’ve been concerned that the right thing wasn’t being done in your workplace ort area of interest, either in relation to you or to someone else. What options were open to you?

What actions did you take?

**Dangers in the night**

In Ruth 3:3-8, the writer uses language that highlights the possibility of a sexual encounter between Ruth and Boaz. ‘Lie down’ can obviously suggest sexual availability and the word for ‘feet’ can be used euphemistically for sexual organs. Furthermore, threshing floors, separate as they usually were from the main part of a village were associated with sexual immorality and prostitution (e.g. Hosea 9:1). In addition, the narrator emphasises Boaz and Ruth’s gender by progressively dropping all adjectives, so that we are left with ‘the man’ and ‘a woman’ alone at night in a secluded spot. In the end, this heightening of the possibility of immorality serves to reinforce the sexual restraint and purity of both parties.

**What does the Bible Say?**

1. What risks does Naomi’s strategy (3:1-4) expose Ruth to?

What does Naomi expect is to happen?

Why might she be doing this?

1. Ruth follows Naomi’s instructions to the letter (3:3, 5-7) except in one respect (3:9b). What might this reveal about Ruth’s character and priorities?

And what might be the significance of her use of the word ‘corner’ (‘wing of your robe’ – 3:9), given that in Hebrew it is the same as the word ‘wing’ used by Boaz in 2:12?

1. Boaz says that Ruth’s kindness (*chesed* in the Hebrew) exceeds ‘that which you showed earlier’ (3:10; cf. 2:11, 1:16-17. Why does he say this?
2. What temptations and risks do Ruth and Naomi expose Boaz to?

What do his responses reveal about his character?

**Going Deeper**

1. Both Ruth (3:11) and the paragon of godly wisdom that is the woman of Proverbs 31:10-31 are described as women of *chail* – noble character. Though different in age, social, marital, and economic status, what characteristics do the two women share? Explore, for example, Proverbs 31:12-13, 15, 25, 26-27, 30.
2. ‘Redeem’ first occurs as a word in Exodus 6 where God describes himself as the one who will redeem his people. What in Exodus 6:1-8 does God promise to redeem his people from, for what purpose, and with what benefits for them?

What connections do you see with the role of guardian-redeemer in Ruth?

**Living it Out**

1. Have you ever been in a situation where you questioned whether to act because of the risk to your reputation? What did you do? And why?
2. In 3:9 Ruth essentially challenges Boaz to become the answer to his own prayer of 2:12. Is there something you’ve been praying for that God might want you to do something to help bring about?
3. What situations do you currently find yourself in that are potentially compromising? Being away overnight for work; going to parties where there’s plenty of alcohol, and perhaps drugs; engaging with vulnerable people; handling funs…?

How do you protect yourself and others who might be involved?