

God's Kindness in a Stranger

1. Intro & Context

- Last week ...
 - Ruth and Naomi back in Promised Land / Bethlehem
 - Naomi and Elimelech and two sons (Marlon & Kilion) gone to Moab because of famine in Bethlehem
 - Elimelech and sons died leaving Naomi and her two daughters in law widowed
 - Naomi hears the Lord has visited promised land and provided food > famine is over
 - Plans to go back > tells the girls to return to their families
 - Oprah goes > Ruth insists on staying
 - Ruth says 'your ppl will be my ppl and your God will be my God'
 - Get back to Bethlehem
 - Naomi insists she is no longer called Naomi = pleasant / lovely ... instead she is to be called 'Mara' = bitter
 - v20-21 - *'The Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty'*
- Despite the bitterness and emptiness of Naomi's circumstances ... right at the end of 1:22 we get a glimmer of hope when we're told ...
 - They arrive in Bethlehem and the barley harvest was beginning
- At this point we're left asking ourselves a few questions
 - Will God do anything to restore Naomi emptiness? > will her life remain empty or will God transform it?
 - Will Naomi remain faithful to God? Or will she give up on him because of her bitterness
 - How will Ruth & Naomi survive in the land?
 - They have no husbands > therefore no means of deriving income
 - Ruth is a foreigner > Naomi is old
 - Will God provide for them?
- We start to see those questions answered in Ruth Ch 2 in God's kindness in a stranger

- **PRAY**

2. God's kindness in a stranger

- Ch 2 starts with quick aside about this guy called Boaz

- *Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side, from the clan of Elimelech, a man of standing, whose name was Boaz.*
- This is very important
 - This is because the OT laws spelled out how certain members of a family or clan had an obligation to defend and provide for any others who were destitute or a victim of injustice
 - If a family was poor and had to sell their land ... a kinsman was required to redeem / buy the land to ensure it stayed within the family
 - Such a person was called a kinsman-redeemer
- With this bit of information ... all of sudden our hopes are raised that there might be someone who can help Naomi and Ruth
 - Will this Boaz be a kinsman-redeemer for Naomi and Ruth?
- v2 we pick up the story again
 - Ruth tells Naomi she is going to go out into the fields to pick leftover grain
 - They don't have husbands to provide for them
 - They're destitute > they need to do something > so Ruth acts
- So she goes out into the fields to 'glean behind the harvesters'
- Gleaning
 - OT made provision for the poor in society > widow, poor, orphan, foreigner
 - God's Law stipulated that farmers were to leave part of their crop for the poor and for immigrants to collect or 'glean'¹
 - *Leviticus 19:9-10* ⁹ *"When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. ¹⁰ Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien (foreigner / stranger). I am the LORD your God.*
 - Israelites were to allow such ppl to go through fields after the harvesters had harvested and pick up left over crop (wheat, barley, olives, grapes etc)
 - Like ANE social welfare system
- Illustration – gleaning at farm for macadamia nuts
- And so off Ruth goes to glean in the fields

¹ Leviticus 19:9-10 and 23:22

- And lo and behold ... who's field does she end up in to glean ... but Boaz
- Now who would have thought that!
- Once again in v3 ... we're reminded that Boaz is from the clan of Elimelech
 - Reminding us of the obligation such a family member had to those in need and therefore raising our hope that this was going to be a good thing for Ruth

- Doesn't take long for us to see this is the case ...
 - Every interaction Ruth has with Boaz and his men she experiences great kindness and blessing
 - v6-7
 - Boaz foreman allow Ruth to glean in the field
 - v8-9
 - Boaz not onely allows her to continue gleaning ... he insists she continue to stay in his fields and not go anywhere else to find food

- But notice how Boaz goes above and beyond what's by the Law
- Boaz isn't legalistic about this > he doesn't just fulfill the minimum requirements of the law > he shows true generosity
 - v8-9
 - She doesn't have to worry about going to get water > Boaz allows her to drink from the workers water jars
 - v14
 - Invites her to share in the workers lunch meal > where we're told she ate all she wanted
 - Boaz gave her so much ... there was leftovers ... and she was able to take a doggy bag home with her
 - v15-16
 - Instructs workmen to take care of her > protect her > not harass her
 - Even tells them to leave extra stalks for her to gather to make it easy for her and ensure she gathers enough

- We see in v17 just how kind and generous Boaz has been
 - At the end of the day she ends up with 22 litres
 - Equates to about 2 weeks wages

 - Average weekly wage in Australia \$1,500pw²
 - She had \$3,000 worth of food ... from one days gleaning

² According to ABS

- Try to imagine if you went into Woolies / Coles and spent \$3,000 what that would look like
- How long would you be able to eat for if you had \$3,000 worth of groceries in your pantry?
 - Maze household ... about 2 days!
- Seriously ... Boaz had been extraordinarily kind and generous to Ruth
 - Not only had he provided for her needs with the food she'd needed
 - He'd offered her protection ... which for a young foreign woman in those days would've made her extremely vulnerable
- And it wasn't just a one off act of kindness as v 23 shows us
 - *'So Ruth stayed close to the servant girls of Boaz to glean until the barley and wheat harvests were finished.'*
 - Boaz showed kindness, generosity and protection to Ruth right throughout the harvest season
- v18 Ruth heads home with all the grain she'd gleaned and threshed
 - How she carried it all? > no idea? > home delivery?
- Naomi is super excited
 - Excited at the amount of barley Ruth was able to glean > which meant they had food to eat
 - But also excited that it was Boaz who's field she gleaned in because he is a close relative and therefore a kinsman-redeemer ... therefore a potential saviour for them both
 - All of sudden ... tables have turned massively for her and Ruth
- And in v20 Naomi exclaims
 - *"The LORD bless him!" ... "He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead."*
- Naomi is seeing that God is indeed restoring her fortunes
 - She'd returned to Bethlehem without her husband and two sons > without much hope of a future
 - So much so she insisted on ppl calling her Mara
 - Now ... she is seeing God start to bless her and Ruth in providing them with ample food and the hope that Boaz might become their kinsman-redeemer
- The word 'kindness' in v20 comes from the Hebrew word 'hesed'
 - Means love, mercy, grace, goodness, benevolence, faithfulness
 - Boaz has shown Ruth and Naomi > love, mercy, grace, goodness, benevolence, faithfulness

- It's kindness that Naomi prayed Ruth and Orpah experience one day in the future back in 1:8
- Here we see God answering that prayer in and through the kindness of Boaz

- But why does he do it?
- What's motivating Boaz to be so kind and generous towards Ruth?
- Does he fancy her?
 - Is this Boaz just using his status and wealth to do a bit of middle-age flirting here?
 - Is he trying to foster a bit of romance and get her to fall for him³
 - Is this like an early episode of farmer wants a wife > ANE style!

- No ... the kindness of Boaz flows out of God's kindness

3. God's kindness to the stranger

- Ultimately behind Boaz's kindness to Ruth & Naomi ... is the kindness of God
- We see this in the passage in several ways
- First ... it's God who establishes in the OT laws the practice for gleaning
 - God has a heart for the poor, widow, stranger, refugee
 - He has compassion for such people
 - So he ensures there's provision for such ppl in the OT law
 - He wants his ppl to be a ppl who take care of others ... and not just themselves
 - One of the things that was meant to characterise Israel from the nations around them was their sense of social justice
 - Comes from the fact that everyone is made in the image of God
 - All ppl deserve to be cared for and not ignored or left to starve or suffer
- So God built into the OT law the regulations about gleaning
 - Like an ANE version of social welfare

- Kindness (hesed) is a key character trait of God
 - He loves to show kindness to the stranger
 - See him doing that here through the gleaning laws

- But we also see God showing kindness in the way he sovereignly ensures Ruth ends up gleaning in the field of Boaz

³ 3:10 would suggest that he is not but is doing so because he is an honourable man who is generous and kind

- v1 – told about this Boaz guy who’s a relative of Naomi and Ruth
- v2 – Ruth says she’s going to go out and pick up left over grain
- Then in v3
 - ***‘As it turned out ... she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech.’***
- This no accident!
- God is sovereignly at work bringing about his kindness and provision for Naomi and Ruth

- So not only did God delight to show kindness to the stranger (Ruth) ... he worked to show kindness in a stranger (Boaz)

- And so the kindness of Boaz flows out of God’s kindness
- Here we need to remember that all the OT law was instruction to Israel how to live in light of God’s kindness to them in rescuing them and redeeming them out of slavery in Egypt
- So when God gives Moses the 10 Commandments on Mt Sinai ... he starts off saying this
 - *Exodus 20:1-2 ... ² "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.*
 - All the law including gleaning laws and those laws that were concerned for showing kindness to others ... flows out of God’s kindness to them

- I think Boaz knew this
 - When he arrived at the field he greeted the men saying “The Lord be with you”
 - They replied “The Lord bless you”
- There’s this sense that God has been so gracious, merciful, loving, and good towards him ... that this flows on to him being gracious, merciful, loving, and good towards Ruth
 - Evident in the way he goes above and beyond what the law requires ... because there’s a true understanding of the kindness God has shown him

4. God’s kindness to us

- Ruth 2 gives us a wonderful insight into nature and character of God and how we might live in response to that
- Firstly we see that God is a God who delights to show kindness to his ppl
 - He shows kindness to the stranger
 - He shows kindness in a stranger

- He shows kindness to us ... because like Ruth we all are strangers
 - Ruth was a foreigner > not one of God's chosen ppl
 - Yet she was adopted into the ppl of God and shown grace, mercy, love and goodness by him
 - Once she worshipped idols > now she has found refuge under the wings of the Lord

- If you're a Christian ... then you were once a stranger like Ruth in the way that God has shown kindness to you
 - He's made himself known
 - Adopted you into his family
 - Forgiven you, blessed you, given you the amazing gift of eternal life
 - Like Ruth ... you didn't deserve it
 - But he's shown you great kindness
- If you're not yet a Christian ...
 - This shows that God wants to and is willing to show kindness to you ... if like Ruth you will come and take refuge under the wings of the Lord

- Not only do we see God showing kindness to the strangers ... also we see God showing his kindness through / in a stranger
 - That's in Jesus
- When Jesus came into this world ... no one welcomed him
 - King Herod & the religious leaders tried to kill him
 - Own family thought he was crazy
 - Ppl from his home town ridiculed him
 - Jews on the whole rejected him
- As far as they were concerned he was a stranger to them

- But God used this stranger in the world to rescue the world
 - Like God did with Boaz ... he showed greatest kindness to the stranger in Jesus in sending him to the cross in our place

- **Our kindness to others**
- The second thing we see from Ruth 2 is that showing 'kindness' / 'hesed' to others is part and parcel of being the people of God
 - Remember hesed = grace, mercy, compassion, benevolence, generosity
- Part of being a Christian therefore means ... showing grace, mercy, compassion, benevolence, generosity towards others
 - God is a God of justice and mercy ... and his ppl are to do the same

- This is really important for us to consider > here's why
- We now live in post-Christian world
 - The Christian worldview is not the main worldview of people around us
 - Influx of other religions and worldviews over the past 50-60 years
- Result us Australian religious culture is very different now than what it was during the early part of 1900's
 - Then Christianity was at the centre of societies worldview
 - Christianity influenced social ethics, politics, social structures
 - Leading Christians were listened to and had influence
 - Christianity was very relevant
- Now, Christianity is on fringe of society
 - For many in Australia ... Christianity is seen as irrelevant

- So how can we help make Christianity be more relevant to people around us?
 - What can we do to help people see that the gospel is worth listening to and makes a difference in people's lives?

- One of those ways is through justice and mercy ministries
 - Doing things where we show 'hesed' / kindness to the poor, marginalised, needy etc
 - Putting faith into action
 - Showing people around us ... that Jesus does make a difference to people's lives and to society

- I think the world is seeing that now with the Ebola outbreak in Africa
 - Who are the westerners who have been infected with the Ebola virus?
 - Christians missionaries and doctors
 - Christians who've gone to that country do justice and mercy > to show hesed / kindness to those in need
 - And for these ppl to take such risks ... others around the world are seeing that and seeing the good they're doing and they're seeing ... Christianity actually does make a difference / gospel is relevant

- Of course practicing justice and mercy doesn't make ppl Christian
 - People still need to hear the good news about Jesus and his death and resurrection for their sin
 - People still need to repent > turn around and follow Jesus
 - But when Christians show justice and mercy to others around them ...
 - it builds a bridge for them to hear the gospel

- because they see the gospel makes a difference to ppl's lives and to our world
- One of Five E's here at church is Engaging the Community
 - As we think about being a church that engages the community ... justice and mercy ministries is one way for us as a church to do that
 - Toys and Tucker
 - Next month > T & T with Mortdale Anglican
 - Woolworths > collect food and toiletries and Christmas hamper items
 - Anglicare use them as their Christmas hampers for those in need
 - ESL
 - PSPS
 - Later this month > World Teachers Day morning tea > kindness
 - Asked principal here at PSPS how can C@P help PSPS
- What other ways can we be showing 'hesed' to those in need
 - What ways can you be showing 'hesed' to ppl God brings into your life?
 - Recently God put on my heart to do something for Christians in Iraq under persecution from ISIS > donation via Anglican Aid
- Let's not just hear what God has to say to us today, and agree in our head that 'kindness' to others is a good thing to do
 - Kindness is not just something for us to consider ... kindness is to be put into action
 - Remember Hesed = is a trait that shows itself in action rather than in word
- As you think about that ... it's worth noting that the kindness Boaz showed Ruth wasn't just a one off act
 - He allowed her to come and glean in his fields for the entire harvest
 - He extended his kindness to Ruth for weeks / months?
 - It was an ongoing display of hesed
- I think this is helpful for us to consider
 - Grace, mercy, compassion, generosity to those in need so often needs to be an ongoing act rather than a one off act of kindness
 - As you look at the opportunities God puts before you to show kindness to others ... often that's something you will need to do for a period of time
- How can we make a difference?

- How can you make a difference?
 - How can you go away from here today and put kindness into action
 - Someone in your street > parent at school > student at uni who's a new migrant
 - Do they need help
 - Navigating Centrelink process
 - Working out public transport
 - Finding where to shop for food, household items
 - Do they have any friends
 - Can you just be their friend?
 - Are they sick
 - Meals, clean, care for kids

- Showing hesed to others isn't just something that happens outside church
 - Happens inside too
 - Like Boaz welcomed and showed kindness to a stranger ... we can show kindness in the way we welcome and include ppl here at church
 - Not just the initial welcome ... an ongoing kindness to ppl

- Someone's new to church
 - Sit with them, chat with them, explain what we do
 - Hang with them after church
 - Offer to catch up with them, have them over for meal, coffee / drink

- But of course, it's not just the new person who considers themselves a stranger
 - There will be ppl who've been coming to church for a while who still consider themselves a stranger because they're yet to be properly welcomed
 - They still feel on the outside > unconnected > ignored > unloved
 - We need to ensure no one remains a stranger in our church
 - Need to include them
 - Talk with them, sit with them
 - Invite them out when you go out / have BBQ / gathering
 - Share life together

- Remember ... our kindness often is ongoing act ... not just one off

- Finally ... another way of showing kindness is being generous

- When Boaz showed kindness to Ruth he was generous with the resources God had given him
 - Let her gather grain
 - Let her eat and drink with his workers
 - Protected her
 - He went above and beyond what the law required
 - He put kindness into action by being generous ... not legalistic
- Friends, be generous with the good things God has given you
 - When it comes to your giving ... don't be legalistic and think what's the minimum I need to give
 - Think ... how can I be generous to those in need with the money and assets God has given me
- Of course ... all of this
 - Our kindness to others in our community
 - Any justice and mercy ministry we do
 - Any kindness we show to those in church
 - Any generosity we display with our money and resources
 - All of that must flow from God's kindness to us
- Like Boaz's kindness to Ruth ... our kindness to others can only come from God's grace, mercy, compassion and generosity to us ...
 - us who were strangers ... and yet he showed great kindness to us in his son
- We show kindness to strangers ... because we all were strangers
- We love others ... in Jesus we have been loved much
- We are generous because God has been so generous to us

PRAY

Our gracious God and Father, we give you thanks that you are a God that delights to bless your people and have done so supremely in your son Jesus. Thank you that in your mercy you chose to bring people from all nations under the wings of your refuge. Thank you we share in that blessing today. Help us to see the blessing you provide is so much more valuable than anything we may need to give up or leave behind in order to follow you. Help us to trust in you and your sovereign plan for us. In Jesus name, AMEN