

More Than a Love Story

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[0 : 0 0] Welcome to another Sermon on the Web from St. John's Shaughnessy Anglican Church in Vancouver, Canada. You are free to use this mp3 audio file and to redistribute it to others without alteration and without charge. After the sermon, listen for more information about St.

John's Shaughnessy Church and the St. John's website. The following message is from the August 6, 2000 service at St. John's Shaughnessy. The Reverend Brian Telfer delivered his message from the book of Ruth, the first chapter, verses 1 to 22. The title of the message is More Than a Love Story.

Last Sunday when I got into the pulpit, the offertory had just been received. And while I was preparing to pray for it, which we never do in Australia, you see we always pray before the offertory in Australia, we find it works best. I won't tell you what that means, but there we are. And I began to pray before I spoke, because I knew even then that my time was limited. It's not that I'm feeling unwell, but there are restrictions on time. And where are all the boys and girls who are still here? Would you just put your hands up? I want you to watch very carefully to see that no adults near you sleep in the next ten minutes that I'm speaking. Ruth is more than a love story. It is more than a love story. It is a story about relationships. And as you know, relationships can often be very confused and confusing.

There was a day in Sydney when Judy was out of the house and a phone call came from North Shore Hospital telling me, or from actually not from the hospital, from a park telling me that this friend who was on the phone had fallen while walking her dog and had broken her ankle very badly. And would I come because the ambulance might be late and get her to the hospital as quickly as I could. So I drove across. She is a single lady and we really are a family. She got to the hospital, they put her into a cubicle, they did tests, they looked, they x-rayed. And then she was waiting on a slab there waiting for whatever was going to happen next. I was chatting to her and in came the doctor to run more tests. I left and went outside, the curtains were drawn and the doctor said to Sheila, Judy's friend who is single, your partner is very shy isn't he? I had become the friend who now was the partner of this lady with a broken ankle. I did what I had to do in the time that I was there and I went home and in the afternoon I guess about an hour later I rang Sheila to tell her that I had this and this and this and whatever it was she had asked for. And the sister who took the phone call said, Mrs. Spencer, your husband is on the phone and he says he has got everything you need. So you see the problem in relationships. In this particular situation I began as a friend, I became her partner in the afternoon and by the evening we were married. I am telling you that Ruth is more than a love story, it is a story about relationships. The relationship between Ruth and her mother-in-law. The relationship between Ruth and Boaz. The relationship between Ruth and Boaz under God and Naomi under God as he shows his kindness to them all. Let me tell you kindness is a predominant word in this story. Another predominant word in the first chapter is return. Though the Hebrew is not always translated return in chapter 1, the word occurs twelve times. For Naomi's going back to Bethlehem is on her part a return to Yahweh, a return to the Lord. She left, she said. I left and I was full.

But when she comes back she says. I have returned and I am empty. She left. She doesn't blame Elimelech for making the decision probably to go. She is involved in it. She has left Bethlehem. And in leaving Bethlehem she has left the place of the Lord. She has left the Lord's people. And her going back empty.

[5 : 2 5] She islet. She is a widow. A widow. She is a widow. And with this Moabite woman. May I say I don't think she thought as kindly towards her as may have been already indicated. I think in fact that Ruth was an embarrassment to Naomi.

because you see the law in the Old Testament in Deuteronomy had already said that no Moabite woman will be ever welcome in the assembly of God's people.

The Moabites had in fact enticed the men of Israel during the journey through the wilderness into sexual immorality and idolatry and God had visited Israel with severe judgment because of what they had done at that time.

No Moabite shall enter the assembly of the Lord yet interestingly this woman is now attached to Naomi the Bethlehemite.

Don't call me Naomi which means pleasant, my delight. No, call me Mara for the Lord has filled me with bitterness.

[6 : 40] The Lord has done terrible things. He has afflicted me and he has brought misfortune upon me. In chapter 2 this self-pitying woman, Naomi, has withdrawn to the wings.

She watches and the main person in chapter 2 is Ruth. We have moved from the emptiness of Naomi and her returning, the very same word used of the prophet in the Old Testament for returning to the Lord, repenting and coming back to him.

This is Naomi. We have moved from that picture to the picture of Ruth who is seeking. She is firstly seeking food.

She comes back with barley. Yes, she has met Boaz. She discovers when she relates the incident to Naomi that Boaz is a kind man.

And you know, Ruth is described by Boaz here equally as a woman of noble character. And the Hebrews have all used at one point to put this book of Ruth in their Bible immediately after the book of Proverbs where you read about the noble woman in chapter 31.

[8 : 12] And those husbands who have read it to their wives constantly here today will know that the noble woman of Proverbs 31 is the woman who works 28 hours a day.

She spins, she cooks, she gathers, she cleans. She cares for her husband. She is up burning the lamp in the night doing things for her children. She is a devoted woman.

And the story of Ruth in many of the Hebrew Bibles of another age was put immediately after the Proverbs indicating where those who gathered the books together felt it belonged in the canon.

In other days it was put before the Psalms as a way of introducing the king of Israel, David who was the Psalm writer. But its place, I think, belongs here where we find it after the book of Judges for it is in that period that the book's story develops.

Ruth is seeking food. She finds food, but she finds more. She finds this man of honour, this noble man who warns her against the dangers of even working with other workers in the field who might entice her, who might treat her badly.

[9 : 36] He offers her shelter and protection. He offers her food. And the incredible thing is this, that in gleaning, as she does in his field, he actually instructs his workmen to pull up some grain and leave it lying in the path so that Ruth can gather it and take it home.

In other words, he goes far beyond what the law required of him to show kindness to this woman who is a widow and is destitute.

He is truly a man of noble character. And he recognises that Ruth is one who has come to find shelter and refuge under the wings of Yahweh, in the tent and the shade of Yahweh.

She has come to find her security and her refuge. Well, she returns from that journey and she tells her mother-in-law that she has in fact met this man and his name is Boaz and he has been kind to her.

And as we have heard, Ruth's mother-in-law, Naomi, is delighted. I can't quite get the squeaky voice that Jean had to express that delight, but she was excited because now she had found a man who was a kinsman, a close relative, who had an obligation, though removed one or two, to somehow redeem the situation, to buy back the land that maybe Elimelech had sold when he went to Noab, so that there would be a name for the family and maybe a child for the family.

[11 : 26] It is Naomi who is the planner and the schemer of chapter 3. She in fact instructs Ruth how she is to dress, the perfume that she is to put on, the way she is perhaps to do her hair.

And it is a very pleasant time that Ruth spends. She comes now to Boaz and she no longer describes herself as a Moabitess or as a foreigner, but she describes herself in relationship to him as his maidservant.

And she is not afraid to address him directly about his obligation. For she tells him, as we read in chapter 3, that he is a kinsman.

And as he has prayed for her in chapter 2 that the Lord would reward her and bless her, she virtually says to him, now take those pious words of yours and act and do something for you are a kinsman redeemer.

And he looks at her and he says, this kindness that you have shown to me, an old man, and you have not chased after the younger, attractive men but have chosen me, this kindness is even greater than the kindness you have shown to your mother-in-law.

[12:52] to Naomi. There is a sense of pregnant meaning and I use those words delicately when Ruth, at the end of chapter 3, returns with her apron full of seed.

Because Boaz has determined that he will bring this matter to a conclusion. Yes, he will care for Ruth and be the kinsman redeemer, but there is a problem.

As with most romances, there is someone closer, another kinsman, and he must be approached. He approaches him, he is not willing to take on the obligation.

Boaz marries Ruth and they have a child, Obed, who is the father of Jesse, who is the father of David. The story reaches back into the Old Testament and it reaches through beyond the Old Testament to the coming of Jesus, the son of David.

But its highlight is kindness. For Ruth finds her place amongst the people of God in spite of her nationality and in spite of law, it is the kindness of God in which she trusts.

[14:14] And she finds shelter in the promise of God's kindness. And in that sense, Ruth shows to us today our path to God.

You see, the Moabites were excluded because of their sinfulness. They were excluded lest they become a hindrance to our own devotion to God as was seen, for example, in the life of King Solomon.

But here is a woman who is destitute and a widow and kindness and grace reaches beyond the law and Ruth experiences the grace and the kindness of God.

God tells us in Scripture that we are in relationship with Him not on the basis of anything that we have done, not on the basis of who we are, but we are in relationship with Him only because of His kindness as we seek that same refuge in Him that Ruth was to seek.

For example, it tells us in the letter to Titus in the New Testament that though we were once deceived and in darkness and enslaved, when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, He saved us not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His great mercy.

[15:50] And when Paul wrote to the Ephesians, he said something very similar. In Ephesians chapter 2 where it comes after Galatians, of course, where we read this. Speaking of the kindness of God, he says, it is, sorry, God who is rich in mercy made us alive in Christ even though we were dead in transgressions.

He raised us up with Christ and seated us with Him in the heavenly realms in order that He might show the incomparable riches of His grace which has been expressed in His kindness to us in Christ Jesus.

It is by grace that you are saved. And so Ruth demonstrates grace and kindness transcending the law. It demonstrates the kinsman-redeemer theme.

Jesus was not ashamed when He came to be called our brother and to call us His brethren. He came, He emptied Himself.

He took upon Him human flesh. He dwelt among us as a man. Then He laid down His life to redeem us. Our kinsman, relative, Redeemer.

[17:12] The whole picture of it is there in the Lord Jesus. And finally, let me say this. I remember Ben Thomas would possibly have given me a peppermint for this, although I don't think I've kept under his time.

But I conclude with this thought. We expect to see God at work in the great and mighty things that He does say, for example, in the Exodus or the things that He does say in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus or in the ministry of Jesus.

We see the great and powerful things God does and we see Him working out His salvation in those great activities. Now, we see God in Ruth at work in the very ordinary lives of very ordinary people, of a widow and a daughter-in-law, of famine and of suffering, of loss and of emptiness.

We see God at work in those circumstances achieving His purpose. And though in the book of Ruth it simply says, it happens that she went to the field where, which Boaz owned.

And it happened that when Boaz sat with the elders in the gate, the nearer relative happened to walk by. We understand from the New Testament that God is sovereign in all things and in everything He works for the good of those who love Him.

[18 : 45] He is overall working out His purpose. And I want to tell you this morning that if you have sought refuge in the shelter of the Most High along with people like Ruth, the Moabitess, Rahab, the harlot from Canaan, Tamer, the mother of Perez related to Boaz who also played the harlot to capture a child from Judah, her father-in-law, if you find your shelter under the wings of the Almighty and find in Him your refuge not because of who you are or what you have done but you seek His kindness, then indeed you find in Jesus your kinsman Redeemer who loved you and died for you and who has gained for you a welcome into the people of God.

So let us pray. Father, for the great and wonderful treasures of your word and for the continuing outworking of your salvation ultimately in Christ that here we see hinted at again and again in the book of Ruth we thank you.

and we pray that we that all who hear my voice and that all who will later today hear our voices might find their refuge in Yahweh the God of Israel the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ in His name we pray.

Amen. This MP3 sermon along with many others is available from the St. John's Shaughnessy website at www.stjohnschaughnessy.org That address is [www.stjohns s-h-a-u-g-h-n-e-s-s-y dot o-r-g](http://www.stjohns-s-h-a-u-g-h-n-e-s-s-y-dot-o-r-g) on the website you will also find information about ministries worship services and special events at St. John's Shaughnessy We hope that this sermon on the web has helped you and that you will share it with others.

Thank you.