

Ruth 3:1-18
I Peter 1:17-21

24th Sunday After Pentecost
Midway Presbyterian Church
November 12, 2023

The Redeemer

Introduction to the Old Testament Lesson

Continuing our four-part series of sermons from each of the four chapters of the Book of Ruth, today we look at chapter 3. In chapter 1 we saw the kindness and faithfulness of Ruth. In chapter 2 Ruth experienced grace as she went out to glean. But now the future looks bleak for the two widows—it's the end of the harvest season. The women who had surrounded the two widows upon their arrival in Bethlehem have disappeared. But Naomi has a plan for Ruth to have a home and security, for Boaz to be Ruth's redeemer—redemption being a key theme of the book of Ruth. Listen to verses 1-18 of chapter 3 . . .

Introduction to the Epistle Lesson

Our Epistle Lesson is taken from chapter 1 of First Peter. In this letter Peter offers encouragement to Christians who are suffering persecution under the Roman Emperor, Nero. In our lesson Peter praises God for the living hope we have in Christ Jesus. He encourages holiness, even as the One who has called us is holy. Peter then recalls the price paid for our redemption. Listen to First Peter 1:17-21 . . .

Sermon

With the seasonal end in sight for Boaz's field to be a source of food, Naomi tells Ruth her plan. Boaz is a relative; so Ruth is to go and lie at the feet of Boaz and then follow his instructions. And so she does. When Boaz discovers her presence, Ruth identifies herself and declares that Boaz is a redeeming kinsman of her family. Boaz acknowledges the truth of her words but points out that there is another one more closely related than he.

A “redeemer” was a person who had responsibility for the welfare of a relative in a variety of ways. The term “redeemer” occurs nine times in the Book of Ruth as a noun and twelve times as a verb. A redeemer is charged to protect vulnerable relatives. That protection can have physical, economic, or spiritual dimensions. Ruth is asking Boaz to become God’s agent of redemption. Ruth is asking for protection, without spelling out how Boaz is to provide it. The theological dimensions of this account should not be lost on us. God’s concern for the poor, the widow, the orphan, and the foreigner echo throughout Scripture, from instructions to the Israelites concerning gleaning to Jesus’ words about care for the “least of these.”

Well, Boaz could have just said “yes.” But instead we hear a veritable outpouring of praise, assurances, explanations, and promises—all sealed with an oath and ending with instructions. (JPS Commentary on Ruth, p. 61) The bottom line is that he agrees with Ruth. “All that you say I will do for you.” (3:11)

But there’s just one problem. There’s another redeemer closer than Boaz. He will have first right, but if he does not want to act as Ruth’s redeemer, then Boaz will. And as we learn in Chapter 4, that’s the way things turn out—Boaz will be Ruth’s redeemer.

As Christians we have a redeemer in Jesus Christ, the Eternal Word who became a person in order to save us. Through his painful death on the cross, he has redeemed us from sin and death, from futility and hopelessness.

Our New Testament lesson from I Peter declares:

You know that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. (1:18-19)

So Peter reminds us of the price paid for our redemption. That redemption cost the broken body and the precious blood of the unblemished Lamb of God—the One “who takes away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29)

William Barclay says that when Peter spoke like that, there were two Old Testament images in his mind. First there was Isaiah 53 with its picture of the Suffering Servant, through whose suffering the people were saved and healed.

All we like sheep have gone astray;
 we have all turned to our own way,
 and the LORD has laid on him
 the iniquity of us all. (v. 6)

But even more so in Peter’s mind was the picture of the Passover Lamb. On that long-remembered night when the people of Israel left slavery in Egypt, the Israelites were instructed by Moses to sacrifice a lamb for each of their households, and to sprinkle the blood of the lamb on the doorposts of their homes. When the angel of death came to an Israelite house, he would see the blood of the lamb, and pass over that house. Each of the firstborn were thus spared, by the sacrifice of a lamb. In the picture of the Passover Lamb, there is emancipation from slavery and deliverance from death.

Yes, Christ is our Lamb, our Redeemer. As we read in Philippians 2:

Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. (vv. 5-8)

While Peter’s hearers remain in exile, subject to the constraints of Rome, nonetheless, they are freed from another form of slavery, those futile ways of life they inherited from their ancestors. But the blood of Christ can free them from all that.

Furthermore, Peter's words come as a call to holy living:

Like obedient children, do not be conformed to the desires that you formerly had in ignorance. Instead, as he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct. (I Peter 1:14-15)

In a similar way Paul speaks to the Christians in Rome:

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, on the basis of God's mercy, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your reasonable act of worship. Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind, so that you may discern what is the will of God—what is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:1-2)

We too are called “not to conform to the ways of the world” with its behaviors that are often selfish and corrupting. While peer pressure to just “go along” can be challenging, we don't have to give in to it. We don't have to set aside God's Commandments. We don't have to be covetous, arrogant, or self-serving. The Holy Spirit can transform us to walk in the more excellent way of Jesus Christ.

And finally there's this story:

A seminary student told of how, when he was a boy, he fell in love with the game of golf. His parents gave him a club and a harmless whiffle-type golf ball which he could hit around the back yard. But one day, thinking his parents weren't home, he was overcome with the temptation to feel the click of a real golf ball against the club. He teed it up and gave it a hard whack. Unfortunately, the ball was not hit properly. It hooked from its intended flight and went directly through one of the windows of the house with a loud crash. Even worse, the crash was followed by a piercing scream.

The boy ran for the house, burst into the living room, and to his horror saw his mother standing in front of the broken window with blood streaming down her face. He cried out, “Mother, I could have killed you!” His mother hugged him and said reassuringly, “It's all right. I'm okay!”

The young man concluded the story by saying, “When I saw my mother bleeding, I knew there were some things I could never do again in the back yard. I could never so much as carry a golf club across the lawn of our back yard. The sight of her standing there with blood flowing down—blood that I had caused—changed my behavior forever.”

Peter would have us see the great price Jesus paid to redeem us from our sins. And seeing our Savior's blood should motivate us to a life of gratitude and holiness.

Yes, Ruth knew Boaz as a redeemer in time. And Boaz embodied Christ-like characteristics in his care for Ruth. And we also know a Redeemer, One who years later was a distant descendent of the marriage of Ruth and Boaz, Jesus Christ—the Lamb of God, who came to save us from our sins and from a futile way of life. He is our Redeemer in time and in all eternity.

To God be the glory. Amen and Amen!