

“DARING TO ACT,” Ruth 3:1-18, June 14, 2026, page 1 of 6. Sermon Prepared by Roberta Schlechter for St. Andrew’s Presbyterian, Portland

It seems to me that the Book of Ruth is about the theology of seeking, and giving, HELP, the kind that makes all the difference. In God’s economy, it’s a way of life. So far in the story, God’s only direct action has been ending the famine in Bethlehem. Everything else happens through *hesed*, through human choices that align with God’s purposes.

Let’s review. In chapter 1, a famine drives Naomi’s family from Bethlehem to Moab. There, her husband, Elimelech, and her two sons die. Grieving her losses, Naomi urges her widowed daughters-in-law to return to their families. But Ruth pledges lifelong loyalty—*hesed*--and travels with her. Naomi arrives back in Bethlehem feeling empty.

In chapter 2, Ruth works in the fields to support Naomi. Boaz, a relative of the late Elimelech, notices and protects Ruth and provides for both women. Naomi recognizes their fidelity and kindness as evidence of God’s *hesed*, and hope returns to her.

Today we encounter a new term, ‘kinsman redeemer’ or in Hebrew, *go’el*. This role embodies covenant loyalty within an extended family. Israelite law describes a *go’el* as a close male relative who is to rescue and redeem any family member that falls on hard times.

Today’s scripture reading centers around securing a kinsman redeemer for Ruth. It features an encounter on the threshing room floor—an episode that needs some context.

Boaz belongs to Elimelech’s generation. Ruth, the Moabite widow, was married to Naomi’s son, Mahlon. Their 10-year marriage brings her into Abraham’s covenant family. But it produced no offspring, which creates the need for a Kinsman redeemer.

The threshing floor in Ruth 3 echoes forward into 2 Samuel, where King David purchases a threshing floor to build an altar. It later becomes the site of Solomon’s temple.

As you listen to today's text, consider *who* in your own family story people remember for showing *hesed*, for having "*willed the good* of another."

With that, here is today's passage from Ruth chapter 3:1-18.

TEXT: Encounter at the threshing floor

3 Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, "My daughter, shouldn't I seek security for you, so that things might go well for you? **2** Now isn't Boaz, whose young women you were with, our relative? Tonight he will be winnowing barley at the threshing floor. **3** You should bathe, put on some perfume, wear nice clothes, and then go down to the threshing floor. Don't make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. **4** When he lies down, notice the place where he is lying. Then go, uncover his feet, and lie down. And he will tell you what to do."

5 Ruth replied to her, "I'll do everything you are telling me."

6 So she went down to the threshing floor, and she did everything just as her mother-in-law had ordered.

7 Boaz ate and drank, and he was in a good mood. He went over to lie down by the edge of the grain pile. Then she quietly approached, uncovered his legs, and lay down. **8** During the middle of the night, the man shuddered and turned over—and there was a woman lying at his feet. **9** "Who are you?" he asked.

She replied, "I'm Ruth your servant. Spread out your robe over your servant, because you are a redeemer."

10 He said, "May you be blessed by the LORD, my daughter! You have acted even more faithfully than you did at first. You haven't gone after rich or poor young men. **11** And now, my daughter, don't be afraid. I'll do for you everything you are asking. Indeed, my people—all who are at the gate—know that you are a woman of worth. **12** Now although it's certainly true that I'm a redeemer, there's a redeemer who is a closer relative than I am. **13** Stay the night. And in the morning, if he'll redeem you—good, let him redeem. But if he doesn't want

to redeem you, then—as the LORD lives—I myself will redeem you. Lie down until the morning.”

¹⁴ So she lay at his feet until morning. Then she got up before one person could recognize another, for he had said, “No one should know that the woman came to the threshing floor.” ¹⁵ He said, “Bring the cloak that you have on and hold it out.” She held it out, and he measured out six measures of barley and placed it upon her. Then she went into town.

¹⁶ She came to her mother-in-law, who said, “How are you, my daughter?”

So Ruth told her everything the man had done for her. ¹⁷ She said, “He gave me these six measures of barley, for he said to me, ‘Don’t go away empty-handed to your mother-in-law.’”

¹⁸ “Wait, my daughter,” Naomi replied, “until you know how it turns out. The man won’t rest until he resolves the matter today.”

As you listened to the text, did family stories of *hesed* come to mind? I’ll name two.

The first story features a wealthy bachelor farmer from Larimore, ND, a man somewhat like Boaz. Around 1885 he met my widowed maternal great grandmother. She had just brought her young sons here from Ireland. She had already spent the little money she carried with her. He told her that if she kept house for him, he would ensure her sons received an education and eventually acquired their own farm or business. He made good on his word. My grandpa graduated from college, served as a high school principal, owned the local printing company, and published the town newspaper. My mother was an assistant editor.

The second story centers on Marine Capt. Dan Godbold. In 1941 he and my father were among those captured on Wake Island. They became POWs, first in China and then in Japan. As a military officer, Capt. Godbold lived in separate quarters and had a Marine cook and coolie servant. Every few days his servant fetched my Dad from the barracks, and Capt. Godbold fed him all he could possibly eat.

Today's narrative is bookended by our NT passage from Matthew 7; *Ask and it shall be given, seek and you shall find*. Jeremiah 29 echoes this, as God says, *"You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."* These words capture Ruth's fidelity and Boaz's familial commitment.

Matthew's genealogy tells us that Boaz is the son of Salmon, by Rahab... *that* Rahab, who lived in the walls of Jericho and protected Joshua's spies. Rahab and her family entered Israel's covenant community and ultimately the Messianic line.

With covenant promises in mind, we look far forward to Revelation 3:
²⁰ "Look!" Jesus says, "I'm standing at the door and knocking. If any hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to be with them, and will eat with them, and they will eat with me." Matthew promises that when we knock, God opens the door. Revelation promises that when we open the door to Christ, we share meal fellowship—just as Boaz offers Ruth in Chapter 2.

It is relational. Boaz calls Ruth "daughter." I thought of this while listening to Rev. Nadia Bolz-Weber's recent sermon about the unclean woman who touches Jesus' cloak. Weber observes: "(Jesus) ... calls her daughter... I've always wondered what that one word spoken by Jesus (or Boaz) sounded like in the ears of a (needy) woman."

Boaz also calls Ruth "faithful" and "a woman of worth," and he tells her not to fear.

This passage highlights the covenant faithfulness of both Ruth and Boaz at a moment easily misunderstood. Verse 9 marks a pivotal moment on the threshing floor. Ruth approaches Boaz at night to seek his protection under Israelite custom.

During harvest, the threshing floor is where workers separated grain from chaff-- an image scripture uses often. They winnowed at dusk to catch the cool Mediterranean winds. Afterwards, owners slept beside the grain for security. This practice was normal across Israel and the wider Near East. Ruth's nighttime visit fits this rhythm: she approaches after the work ends, when privacy becomes possible. Yet the setting remains public enough to protect reputations.

Lying at someone's feet signaled a servant's posture. Ruth approaches Boaz not as an equal but as one seeking mercy. Now, Naomi had told her to "do as Boaz instructs," But Ruth kinda pops the question when she says, "Spread your garment over your servant." In biblical imagery, she makes a marriage proposal within proper custom.

Boaz keeps his cool. Remember, he is Rahab's son. Mom made a deal with the Hebrew spies, and some scholars believe that Salmon, Boaz' father, was one of those spies.

Boaz praises Ruth for showing "more kindness now than before." He knows her devotion to Naomi. Her *greater* kindness here lies in seeking to preserve her late husband's family line through Boaz, even though younger men were likely available.

Boaz mentions his friends "at the gate," the place where elders resolved legal and civic matters, and blessed or rejected proposals. He means that everyone of influence recognizes Ruth as a woman of noble character.

Ruth, having worked hard, is a strong woman. Boaz sends her home with "six measures" of barley--likely at least 30 pounds. Such a gift signaled good will toward a bride's family.

So how does Ruth chapter 3 speak to us today, some 3000 years later?

A bit more from Nadia Bolz-Weber: "This is what our scriptures do. They interpret us. Scripture reaches into our stories and weaves them together with God's word until we see our lives, so inflected with God's Word that it's really hard to unsee it. And that sweet thing that happens when the scripture's read out loud, when the psalms, the hymns are sung, when the gospel is spoken over us, when we confess how limited we are and how limitless God is, when we open empty hands for a piece of bread and a blessing, what shall we call this but help?" Let's call it *hesed*.

The book of Ruth opens with the words: "*In the days when the judges ruled...*" Judges 21 tells us, "*Everyone did what was right in their own eyes.*" Sounds familiar, doesn't it. When we face economic, political, and cultural anxiety,

Ruth reminds us that courage and kindness don't require certainty—only faithfulness, keeping our eyes on God.

At St. A's we build faith through hospitality and care packages, prayer and quilts, landscape and building repairs, Bible study and song, intergenerational fellowship and home visits, canned goods and tenant neighbors. If a visitor sought evidence of *hesed* at St. Andrew's, I would simply say, "Look around." It fills every seat in countless ways.

Hesed lives in the St Andrew's DNA. But we need to own it consciously. Whether life feels ordinary or chaotic, God is at work through us.

Amid everything we confront, what matters are the deep, faithful, daily choices we make. That's God's Word to us. That's the story of Ruth and Naomi, and Boaz--the kinsman redeemer. Let us always be there for our neighbor in need. It's the heart of God, *hesed*, the path of life.

<https://www.workingpreacher.org/podcasts/675-ruth-esther-summer-series-may-31-2026>

Nadia Bolz Weber at St. John's Cathedral, June 7, 2026