

Read Ruth 2:1-18.

Years ago now, I was invited to join a small group of women for a bachelorette camping weekend. A good friend of mine was getting married, and her best friend had planned a one-night excursion up in the Pemberton area. But the road we had to take to get to this remote and unpopulated, but beautiful, camping area was to take a long service road.

And if you've driven on service roads, they're not the smoothest. This particular road, all gravel of course, had a number of sections with large rocks. And although we were driving a big Toyota four-runner with four wheel drive, the five of us bouncing in our seats were still a bit concerned.

Well, the four of us. The driver was highly confident that her four-runner could handle anything. And it was on the trip back where she decided to really gun it and take us for a roller coaster ride down this service road, bumping along at a speed that made the four of us passengers pretty uncomfortable.

Well, inevitably, after one large bump we heard a loud 'bang,' pulled over, and not just one but *two* of our tires had been punctured. What do we do? We're literally in the middle of nowhere.

But actually, we weren't technically in the middle of *nowhere*. Maybe 200 metres up the road we had passed a First Nations community. That trip was actually the first time that I truly realized how pushed out these people groups have been.

So I volunteered to walk back with the driver while the other three women stayed at the car. But as we walk onto the reserve, I immediately feel like I'm trespassing; like I'm on private property. I'm an outsider, stepping on land where I shouldn't be, where I'm not supposed to be. I don't belong.

I felt a little like Ruth, knocking on doors, trying to find a hospitable face who would help us. We even tried peeking into the little run-down church in the middle of the community.

Finally one door opened, and it was a pregnant woman holding a coffee cup, with a toddler grasping onto her shorts. We explained our situation, and she went and got her husband. Within minutes, he had grabbed his tire repair kit and was inviting us to hop in his truck—a big black dodge ram.

Nicest guy you'd ever meet. He brought us back to where our stranded friends were waiting, got one of the holes plugged, and then helped us get the spare tire in place of the other ruined tire which had suffered a big slash.

And I remember us asking him, "How can we thank you? Can we pay you for your time?" And he shook his hands at us and said, "No, no. In my culture, we believe that what goes around comes around. If I show kindness to you, you show kindness to someone else, and everyone wins."

And I remember being surprised by that. Because most people would simply say, “Oh no, don’t worry about it.” But here was someone whose kindness was rooted in something deeper. It was *just* kindness. It wasn’t just being nice.

It was true hospitality, to people he didn’t know, who were outside of his own community, who had probably interrupted his own rhythm and plans, and who really had nothing to give back to him in return.

But he didn’t need that. To express kindness through hospitality was enough. Yes, it involved perhaps a level of discomfort and sacrifice, but hospitality is *always* sacrificial. Hospitality always involves sacrifice.

Look at this story of Boaz. Ruth, the Moabite, is a foreigner in the land of Bethlehem. She’s left family and friends behind in order to stay with her mother-in-law Naomi. Both of them have lost their husbands. Both of them are widows. And although Ruth had the option to stay in Moab and remarry, she chose to cling to her mother-in-law and seek after Naomi’s welfare above her own.

So when they return to Bethlehem, Ruth right away looks for a place where she can work and provide for her mother-in-law. And she comes across a field where the foreman allows her to glean behind the harvesters.

Now, basically what this means is that while the men were harvesting the crops, there were servant girls who picked up and gathered all the portions that were being harvested, and anything that was left over—by law—was meant to be left so that the poor could pick up the scraps.

It was imbedded in Israelite law to do this. Leviticus 19: “*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 foreigner. I am the Lord your God.*”

And Deuteronomy 24: ¹⁹ *When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.*

To be hospitable and mindful of the less fortunate was *imbedded into the laws of Israel*. It was meant to be part of their way of thinking; it was meant to come naturally to them.

Now, I highly doubt that everyone actually obeyed this law. But whoever owned this field that Ruth was working in certainly had. Because as it turned out, Ruth was working in a field that belonged to a man named Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelek, Naomi’s deceased husband. He’s a relative.

And just look at the way he greets his workers. Verse 4: *“The LORD be with you!”* And all his harvesters echo back: *“The LORD bless you!”*

Imagine if you worked in a place where your boss walked into the room and did that. It might feel a little strange at first; but guaranteed it would put a smile on your face.

Boaz just exudes a heart of hospitality. And when he finds out who Ruth is, he’s not thrown off by the fact that she’s a foreigner.

Look at *her* response in verse 10: *“Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?”* As if to say that she’s not supposed to be treated this way. She doesn’t belong in Bethlehem. She isn’t of the group, the tribe, the community, the clique. She looks different. She speaks different.

She’s someone that Boaz has to specifically tell his men *not to touch*. Which seems to imply that foreigners had less protection. A foreigner like Ruth didn’t have a male to protect her like all the women of Israel would have had.

But now look at his little monologue to Ruth. He’s very intentional in how he speaks to her. And what he says to her—I think—is a helpful structure for thinking about hospitality.

- 1) He calls her daughter, which right away abolishes her ‘outsider’ status. In his eyes, she simply isn’t an outsider, and so she shouldn’t be treated as one. She should be treated like family.
- 2) He invites her to stay. Don’t go and look for another place to be, he says. In other words, you are welcome *here*. He makes that very clear.
- 3) He instructs her to follow along after the women—which is basically him saying, “Be like one of the slave girls who are gathering up the sheaves. Behave as if you are one of my employees; as if you’re one of us. Gather like the other girls are doing and take home whatever you can carry. You’re a part of us.
- 4) He gives her permission to get a drink whenever she needs it. Moabites and Israelites didn’t traditionally drink from the same cups. But make yourself at home. Help yourself. You don’t need to ask for permission; you already have it. You *belong* here.

And then he offers these beautiful words in verse 12: *“May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.”*

Look at what he’s doing there. In no way is Boaz putting *any* focus on himself. He’s admiring Ruth for her bravery and her courage in remaining committed to Naomi, to seeking *her* welfare. And then he places Ruth under the protection of the Lord.

In other words, Boaz's hospitality towards Ruth is *a reflection*, a demonstration, of the welcoming that the Lord has given her. This isn't about Boaz. His efforts are simply an extension of what he knows *God* is offering *to* her.

May *He* be the one who rewards you—not me. May *He* be the one who protects you—not me. I am simply the steward of *His* hospitality.

Now, just take a minute right now and imagine if God's people were known for being an extension of His hospitality? We talked on Thanksgiving Monday about how the Lord's Table is meant to be extended out, like the roots of a Redwood tree. We are blessed to be a blessing. We are fed to feed others.

What would it look like for *you* to be an extension, an arm, of God's hospitality? Isn't the whole gospel about Divine hospitality? God's extensive and expansive welcome to each one of us who believe in the open invitation He has given us through Christ?

Remember those four things that Boaz said and did for Ruth, and now think about Jesus.

1) In Luke 8, there is a woman who was an outsider because she had a condition where she had been subject to bleeding for twelve years—meaning that she was ostracized, unable to worship in the temple, basically seen as a leper. She is the only one in the gospels who Jesus calls, "Daughter."

"Daughter," he says, "*your faith has healed you. Go in peace.*" In other words, she is no longer an outsider. Jesus has redefined her.

2) Remember Jesus' call of Matthew the tax collector. Matthew's a traitor to his own people. His own family has likely disowned him. He's chosen money over loyalty. He's 'gone to the other side.' He literally steals money for Rome from his own people.

And Jesus says to him, "*Follow me.*" He invites Matthew to come and to stay. Don't worry about what you did before. You've been invited. You're welcome here.

3) Remember Jesus' encounter with the two blind men who are sitting by the road outside of Jericho. Jesus has a large crowd following him, bubbling with enthusiasm, pestering him with questions, and these two lonely men—clearly ostracized, because they're sitting outside of the city—they disrupt the joy and shout out to Jesus, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on us!"

The crowds rebuke them and tell them to quiet down—which was the common reaction to men like this. Stop being a bother. You did this to yourself. Deal with your own problems. We have more important matters.

But Jesus stops and asks them, *“What do you want me to do for you?”* And he takes compassion on them, *touches* their eyes, and heals them. Receive my mercy, in other words. You are no longer on the outside; you are a part of what I’m doing. You are a part of us.

And 4) Remember Jesus’ conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well. He asks her for a drink of water. Samaritans and Jews didn’t drink from the same cup, but Jesus doesn’t have those barriers.

In drinking from the woman’s cup, He’s basically saying that she has been granted permission to be in communion with Him. She can make herself at home in this conversation. She doesn’t need to be afraid. She belongs here.

She doesn’t even realize that it’s the Lord Himself whose care she has unknowingly come under. No man has ever cared for her or spoken to her like how Jesus does in this passage.

But what Christ does for her, and what Boaz did for Ruth, is what Christ now does for every single person who comes to Him.

He flings open the hospitality of God and says, “Come, work in my field. I won’t lay anything heavy or burdensome on you. I will provide for you with the nourishment you need. You belong here.”

You belong here.

Have you ever thought that one of the most powerful messages you send to someone when you open up your home to them, when you extend the invitation of hospitality, when you share a meal, when you—perhaps—invite someone to *live* in your home, or to stay with you, to do life with you, that the most powerful message you’re sending to that person is, “You belong here”?

To the child who needed a family: “You belong here.”

To the neglected who needed a safe place to run: “You belong here.”

To the addict stuck in isolation and needing community: “You belong here.”

To the disgruntled neighbour who lost his wife: “You belong here.”

To the foreigner who doesn’t know the common language: “You belong here.”

To the teenager who was feeling alone: “You belong here.”

Is that not what Jesus has done for you? Is that not the Father's loud-and-clear message to you? To ask you to look at the outstretched arms of His Son on a cross and say, "Have I not made myself clear to you? You belong *with me*."

In other words, *I am* your home. This is your safe place. This is your house of rest. This is where I will feed you and sustain you. This is where you can find water that never again lets you go thirsty.

This is your house of refuge.

There's a book called "The Gospel Comes with a House Key" by Rosaria Butterfield, and in it she writes that radically ordinary hospitality—the kind that runs counter-cultural to the societal norms of rushing and filling our schedules—*implies* that we build margin into our days, the kind of margin where our regular routines can be disrupted but not destroyed.

"This margin," she says, "stays open for the Lord to fill—to take an older neighbour to the doctor, to babysit on the fly, to make room for a family displaced by a flood or a worldwide refugee crisis."

Radically ordinary hospitality, she says, implies that our houses don't need to be perfect.

Radically ordinary hospitality implies recognizing that God has placed certain neighbours in our midst on purpose.

Radically ordinary hospitality implies knowing that our God is a God who seeks to put the lonely in families (Psalm 68:6), and so He's probably wanting to use *my* house and *your* house as living proof of this.

Radically ordinary hospitality, she says, implies that we "take the hand of a stranger and put it in the hand of the Savior."

If God is in fact our house of refuge, that means that every single one of our homes can be an extension of that refuge. It means that this community, this group here that we call our church family, is an extension of that refuge.

Through the doors of this building or through the doors of our own homes, it must be our constant prayer that people would walk through the doors and be able to feel the warmth of refuge. Of Christ's hospitality gushing out.

Because every single person who encountered Jesus—at least from what we read in the gospels—was never the same. For every single one of them, their lives were transformed *because of* their encounter with Jesus.

They came through the doors as they were, they had their brokenness revealed in God's timing and met with love, and they walked out wanting to run back in for more. There was a hunger for more.

Notice that the pinnacle of this encounter between Boaz and Ruth is when he extends a *second* invitation for her to come for more, to come around the table for lunch. "*Come... have some bread and dip it in the wine vinegar.*" And the text says that she ate all she wanted and had some left over.

Again, is that not the same invitation that has been given to us? Does the depth of Christ's hospitality not get deeper and deeper the more we are welcomed in?

Has not this same God, the God who guided Ruth to 'happen across' the field of Boaz, has not *this* God, now in Jesus, invited us to eat *with* Him, *of* Him, and *in* Him, and to eat all that we desire? To take home as much as we can carry and share it with others?

Has not He invited us to feast, and then with joy and thankfulness extend that feasting hospitality to those in need? To those who are hungry, displaced, or lonely? To see that He—as our Host—is with us when we extend *His* hospitality to others?

From the moment that Boaz steps onto the scene, his hospitality is rooted in something deeper. In his greeting, in his kindness, in his generosity, he is saying to everyone that the Lord is here. This is the Lord's field. This is the Lord's provision. This is the Lord's refuge over you.

Jesus too, from the moment that He stepped onto the scene, in the flesh, said to everyone that the Lord is here. This is *My* Father's world. *I am* His provision. *I am* your refuge.

And *I* have sacrificed for you.

So share in my hospitality, He says. Because you are no longer an outsider. You have been invited. You're family. You are a part of me.

You belong here.