

Prophets). Five of these books became known as the five scrolls. And they were adopted as the scriptures to be read for major festivals. Ruth was and is read at the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost.

So why would Ruth be read at Pentecost? Well, as we said, Pentecost was also known as the Festival of Weeks - Ruth is focused upon harvest - Ruth 1, the harvest has failed, forces the migration; Naomi and Ruth return as the harvest begins at Bethlehem; Ruth 2 is about events during harvest; Ruth 3 & 4 - the harvest has ended and Ruth's future is revealed.

However Pentecost is also the festival that remembers the Torah being given at Sinai. Jewish rabbis examined the scripture and the journey from Egypt and suggested that it took 50 days from the first Passover to their arrival at Sinai and the Law is given.

So why would Ruth be read at Pentecost remembering the Torah being given to God?

Three suggestions from Jewish writers:

1) The Law is about faithfulness, God faithfully commits to Israel; Israel is to be faithful to him; Ruth declares, and shows faithfulness to her mother in law;

2) at Sinai Israel took on the Torah, the Law and its obligations; Ruth declares 'your God will be my God' - she takes on the Torah upon her self;

3) the word of God is not about head knowledge or study, it leads to action, it shapes response." You walk the talk." Boaz is a man faithful to the Law in how he treats Ruth and also how he will act as the kinsman redeemer.

A further thought to consider. How does Ruth, from a Christian perspective, inform Pentecost, if we read it on that Sunday or in the days afterwards. What themes connect Ruth to what happens at Pentecost when the Spirit is poured out... to think upon by yourself.

We have reached a point in our story, after migration, exile, death, sorrow and bitterness, where we saw a crossroads, a turning point in Ruth's life. Ruth 1, covered a decade. Ruth 2 covers just 24 hours. A day which will change the course of Ruth and Boaz's lives. Someone said: "while all time belongs to God, and is significant, a short decisive episode can accomplish what years failed to do." (Robert Fyall, *Ruth*, p.22).

24 hours now begins. At the end of part 1 of the story, Naomi laments her emptiness and how the Lord has afflicted her. Ruth asks if she can go out and glean, pick up any left over grain.

Despite the welcome, despite family members in the village, it appears that no ongoing support has come to the two widows. They need to go and glean, they are not being provided for. Ruth is given permission to go, but note two things.

Naomi does not raise the concern of her personal safety which Boaz later raises, and which Naomi mentions when Ruth returns.

Also Naomi does not mention about her relative of good standing.

The harvest only lasts 7 or so weeks - from late April to early June. Her plan is to collect leftover grain after the harvest as permitted in the Law of Israel.

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 foreigner. I am the Lord your God. (Leviticus 19, NIV).

Also, ²² “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. Leave them for the poor and for the foreigner residing among you. I am the Lord your God.” (Leviticus 23, NIV).

(Also you can see in Deuteronomy 24:19-24).

It is wonderful that in the civil laws given to Israel, there are these commitments to the poor and to the foreigner - expecting there to be a need and also that there will be non Jews among the people of Israel.

Ruth is a lady of courage, bravery and humility. She is vulnerable because she is a widow and a foreigner. The Question will be what happens when she walks out that door. You see, we know Israel's history, there were many civil laws given to Israel and yet they were ignored or rejected at different times - we see that in the prophets easily, for example in the prophetic book of Amos. Also, the book of Ruth began - 'in the days when the judges ruled' - now you just need to read Judges to see what all sorts of things could happen and it depended on the judge or leader at the time...

v3 - "she went out, entered a field, and began to glean behind the harvesters." Good start.

Then the phrase - scripture says: "as it turned out, she was working in a field belonging to Boaz."

She wandered along the streets of Bethlehem, went out to the field, and wam, she is there in the one field that is owned by the one relative who can help them. The Lord of the Harvest is at work here! So this leads us to an interesting question. Is life about only coincidences or are there God incidents? We have no clue how this has occurred. Naomi says nothing to Ruth. The chapter ends with Ruth still in the dark - when she mentions Boaz, she has no clue who he is, then Naomi gets all excited (see v20). A similar story is about Abraham's servant - Genesis 24 - who seeks a wife for Isaac - as it turns out, he ends up at the well of Abram's relatives! Can 'coincidences' - some of them at least - be a particular example of God working in ways plain to him, but not to us. Does that help our walk with God, if we look at trivial happenings in that way? That encourages us to pray, in such situations, "Lord, help me be part of your work here." Can it be in our week ahead, that "as it turned out" events are coming.

Some further practical applications from these opening verses.

1. We are reminded of God's continuing resourcefulness. In her grief or numbness or bitterness, she had forgotten Boaz, or perhaps felt that he could or would do nothing to help.

"God is not limited by our lack of resources; nor is he ever without solutions, whether we can see them or not." (Robert Fyall, *Ruth*, pg 23). Naomi could not see it or believe it. That did not stop working or acting.

- 2) Secondly, there is a part played by human resourcefulness, Ruth takes the initiative - it is a key factor - it puts her in the right place at the right time to take advantage of Yahweh's provision. Our human responsibility or resourcefulness is not taken away by God's action. Paul - as we saw a few weeks ago - in Acts 16 seeks to build the church and preach the gospel. He goes where

he thinks is best and right. Yet along the way he is told no, until eventually in Troas he is told yes. He had a responsibility to move on with what he knew to be God's general will - that the gospel would be heard.

3) Third, God's provision, and human response belong together. We do not live in a world of rigid determinism, which reduces us down to puppets. Not is it a human centred universe where God is little more than an emergency helpline, a biblical 999 or 112. God works in and through our universe and interacts with us, who are made in his image.

Thanks to Robert Fyall for these applications in his book on Ruth, (p.29)

Let's continue a little further. Boaz comes onto the scene. Again, as we said, the first words from the mouth of a character in the Bible, often seen to reveal much of their character or what drives them. Boaz comes to work. He is a man of wealth. He has fields. He has servant girls. He has a foreman and he has workers. He comes to work. Now some men in his position - wealth, influence - would have ignored the workers. But he greets them and pays attention.

Not only does he greet them. He wishes them the presence of Yahweh. "The Lord be with you." This is not a regular greeting. This is, desiring that Yahweh's active presence is with them in their day to day lives, in their work in all aspects of life, not just in emergency or not just in worship and sacrifice, his active presence to be with them in their manual labour, in their sweat and toil as they bring in the harvest. What he prays / wishes is a key thread of our story - God's involvement in the most ordinary of circumstances in the lives of a few individuals. In these

chapters of the Book of Ruth, we are seeing Yahweh's involvement in the lives of 2 widows, in a small village, in Israel.

The workers respond with "Yahweh bless you!" An impression of faith being part of the working life on these fields. An acknowledgement of the faith Boaz holds himself. A warm relationship between employer and employee. He wants the best for them, they want the best for him.

Boaz asks his foreman about Ruth. Then comes the first conversation between them - a public one with people coming and going. The next one will be more private, at nighttime. He gives her advice and shares how he has taken steps to ensure her safety and comfort, and to make the task of gleaning easier for her. Ruth acknowledges that what she had hoped for has happened - she left the house, with the hope "in whose eyes I find favour" and now she tells Boaz, she has found favour in his eyes. Boaz praises her for her commitment to Naomi, how she has left her family and kin to come and join the people of Israel, and he acknowledges she has come to take refuge under Yahweh's wings. Ruth had made her declaration of faith on the road. Boaz is aware by her actions and what he has heard, her faith is genuine, her actions are true.

We do not know where Ruth's living faith came from. Was it from the example of Naomi or Ruth's own husband before he died. Was Naomi praying for her to come to that understanding? Was it Naomi's lifestyle that sowed the seeds. Did Naomi talk about Yahweh so Ruth understand that "your God" was not the same as 'the gods' that her and her sister has grown up with? It is silent I agree. Yet I would believe at least two of these were in action - example and talking.

But can I suggest that all these three are ways part of sharing our faith: There is our personal example and lifestyle. American 19th century evangelist DL Moody wrote: "Out of 100 men, one will read the Bible, the other 99 will read the Christian." Our lifestyle matters. Ruth on that day, sees people shaped by the Torah, in very practical ways, she saw God's word lived before her.

Our praying for people to come to understand, for eyes to be opened to the gospel. As Paul prays for King Agrippa to become a Christian like Paul, except for the chains Paul has.

And Talking. Ruth may have not known what was different about Yahweh than her gods. She learned. People can see our good lives, they can appreciate our example, we may be praying for them, but if they do not know we are Christians, it is possible, they may think it is another spiritual source, or you or I am simply a special good man or woman, one in a thousand and not know how your faith moves you shapes you. They may have a whole set of ideas about who Jesus is, yet they may not line up with the truth. How can people commit to someone they don't know. Whatever happened, in her spiritual journey, Ruth declared, 'your God will be my God.'

What happens next is striking. Not only has Boaz given her rights to glean in his fields for the 7 weeks of the harvests, not only has he extended protection over her, telling the men not to harass her embarrass her, or harm her, he has also told her to stay with his servant girls, and not to keep her distance. He has gone beyond the law in the rights given to someone who comes to glean. He only had to give her access. He has been incredibly generous and kind. He has given protection and status and provision (water). Now at the meal he invites her to eat, he invites her to be part of the community, eating together with him and the harvesters. She is given so much food to eat that

she is full and she has some left over to take back. He goes further and tells the harvesters just not to obey the law - to leave bits of grain - but actually take sheaves and drop some for her. It means she gleans much more, with less effort and can take more back to Naomi and her. And it is a cost for Boaz - as he has left to sell or to store. At the end of the 24 hours, she works hard and brings home what she has. The amount has been described as at least 5 times what they would need for that day. Naomi and Ruth now have no fear about food. Boaz went way beyond the law's requirements...and it is suggested that Naomi and Ruth were provided for, in similar means, during the following seven weeks.

But also.

Boaz wished in 2:12, "the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord." Boaz's prayer has been fulfilled spectacularly hasn't it. Yet how did it happen? The prayer is made. The answer. Through Boaz. Boaz was the agent by which Yahweh's care and provision would come.

It brings us back to the first question. Have you ever been the answer to someone's prayers. Have you ever been the answer to your own prayers for someone?

Dallas Theological Seminary, in Texas, USA, has a worldwide reputation now as a place of teaching. It was founded in 1924. Shortly after opening, it almost closed due to financial need. On one particular day, the creditors were ready to close it. On that same morning, the founders of the school gathered in the President's office to pray for God's provision. During that prayer meeting, one member of the group desperately prayed, "Lord, we know that all the cattle on a thousand hills are yours," which

is a quotation from Psalm 50:10. He then continued, "Please sell some of them and send us the money."

About that same time, a Texan, with boots and the hat, walked into the business office. "I just sold two carloads of cattle over in Fort Worth. I've been trying to make a business deal go through, but it just won't work. I feel God wants me to give this money to the seminary. I don't know if your need it or not, but here's the check." With that he handed it to her and walked out.

Knowing the need, the secretary took the check and went to the door of the prayer meeting. After a soft tap on the door, Lewis Chafer, the founder and president of the school, answered the door and took the check. Instantly he recognized the name on the check. Knowing he was a rancher, Dr. Chafer turned and stunned the group with these simple words, "God sold the cattle."

*Answers to the prayers of others...*The rancher did not know people were praying, yet he became the answer to their prayers. When have we been the answer to prayers, when have we been the answer to our own prayers for others?

So 24 hours. It began with bitterness. Naomi at the end of the day, declares God's kindness, she is being restored, being healed, she ends in praise. She does so, through the providence of God, through the actions of Ruth and great generosity of Boaz. Boaz is God's provision embodied, he is the agent of God's action. Boaz was an answer to his own prayer for Ruth to be blessed.

Prayer: Lord God, you know us better than we know ourselves. Our Lives are in your hand. And you are committed to us by promises that you cannot and will not break. Help us to trust you

when there is little pattern or meaning in events, and when we cannot see. Give us faith to trust you in the every day circumstances of our lives and to believe that you are working everything for good. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.