

Sisters and Brothers in Christ, Grace and peace to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

We are now into the second week of Ruth. Ruth is a book from the Old Testament, which takes place in the time after the Exodus, when the Hebrews left Egypt to strike out on their own and before the time of the Kings. This period is known as Judges. People would come forward as God had called them to lead the people. Israel was just beginning to form, they were establishing themselves as a people. It was kind of a rough and tumble period, almost like what we would consider the wild west. And in our story today, we continue on with Naomi & Ruth's story.

Naomi was from Bethlehem who had moved to Moab, a neighboring country, with her husband Elimelech and their two boys. They moved there to escape a famine in Israel. While they were there, the boys each married a local girl. Their father, Elimelech passed away and then 10 years later, they both passed away. So it was just Naomi, with her two daughters-in-law, Ruth & Orpah, living in the land of Moab. Naomi heard that things were better back home in Bethlehem, so she decided to go back home. She told the girls to leave her, to go back home to live with their families. Orpah went back to her parent's come, but Ruth stayed with Naomi. She said, "where you go I'll go, where you stay I'll stay. Your God will be my God and where you die, I will be buried there too." So they went back to Bethlehem.

And that's where today's reading picks up. Now Naomi and Ruth were both widows, so all they had to do was go down to the local Social Security office to fill out the paper work stating that their husbands had passed away and that they wanted to file for Social Security... Oh wait, they didn't have that yet. In fact, Social Security is less than 100 years old. So how did 2 women take care of themselves? Where would they get food? Our reading for today talks about Ruth going out to follow the reapers. I wish that I had an old scythe to show you. Back before the days of combines and harvesters, they had to harvest by hand. The land owner would hire workers to harvest the crop and process it. I think that there are a couple of really neat passages in Leviticus that talk about harvesting and reaping. The bible commands the landowners to not harvest all the way in the corners of the field and to leave a few rows on the edge still standing. The owners of a vineyard are not to strip the vine completely bare. They are to leave some of the crop out in the field for the poor people to go out and harvest. Specifically, the bible says, for the widow, orphan and the alien living in your land. Leave something for them to pick so that they might have something to eat. And God explains it this way, "Because you were foreigner in a strange land you should remember that." Remember where you came from.

And so that is what is happening in this story. Ruth is poor and a foreigner! And so she goes out to the fields to glean. And she unknowingly ends up on fields owned by Boaz, who happens to be a relative of her former father-in-law. It turns out that this Boaz is a pretty good guy. He tells his guys to not bother Ruth, because that was part of the risk, that women were assaulted while they were gleaning the fields. After all, they didn't have anyone to protect their honor. So Boaz told his guys to leave her alone and in fact, leave a little extra for her. Part of this was

out of familial obligation. They were fiercely loyal to family members. Also, Boaz was a decent human being. He helped out Ruth so that she end up with an ephah of barley. One place said that it was about 30 pounds! And she brought it back to Naomi, her mother-in-law to share it with her. And for Naomi, she is beginning to see hope. She had returned to Bethlehem a bitter woman because her husband had died and so did both of her sons. Her social security was gone! But luckily Ruth stuck by her. Ruth stayed and helped out Naomi and began to make connections, like this one with Boaz and Ruth was sharing her good fortune with Naomi. And our reading for today ends with, “<sup>2</sup>So she stayed close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests; and she lived with her mother-in-law.” Ruth continued to go out and glean from Boaz’s fields.

Does the word “glean” sound familiar to you? Have you ever worked a shift at the food shelf and been back in the warehouse when a load of food came in? Where did that food come from? What do we call the people that go pick up that food from the stores and restaurants? Yeah, gleaners! What we do at the food shelf is biblical! We go out into the “fields” the stores and glean from their excess. We get to take that and feed the poor and foreigners that are in our midst.

I try to maintain an attitude of gratitude. It is so easy to get down in the dumps because of our world today. But we have an amazing God! One that loves us and takes care of us. He also gives us a little kick in the pants when we need it. We are giving miracles every single day. They aren’t always big, miraculous healings. Most of the time, they are small, mundane little miracles. But they are miracles that we get to be part of. Sometimes, it is as simple as a Hardee’s biscuit or Raphael’s donut. We can take part of helping feed Jesus’ sheep. We can help glean from the fields so that the poor and foreigners amongst us can be fed. We get to see that the bible is still alive and relevant in our world today. We get to see that God is still alive and relevant today. We get to see God! Amen.