

Growing up in the 1960s & 70s, a staple of riding in the car was listening to Paul Harvey, who with his Oklahoma twang would read the day's news, replete with shifting from the front page to local stories by announcing "Page TWO..." And late each afternoon he had a second Radio Show in which he would tell "The Rest of the Story." Often times in worship we will use a story as an illustration, and when the point is made, the sermon moves along to the next illustration; then persons come to me at Coffee Hour inquiring "So what happened, tell us the rest of the story?" as if the story is not done until redeemed.

Last week we read the first Chapter of the Book of Ruth to illustrate how we honor our dead. We described this is a story about Ruth committing a sacred covenant: "Where you go I shall go, where you lodge I will lodge, your people will be my people, your God my God," told by a male dominated culture, within a time in history when men ruled and women were not allowed a voice in their own destiny. Women were property of husbands, even after death. But this morning, as we read the conclusion of Ruth, commitment becomes a story of what we are willing to do for redemption. That Wording I think is important, because as all those who have been working on the Holiday and Patio Sales have come to learn, the Prices we are willing to pay, are not so important as what we are willing to do for redemption.

Leaving Moab, returning across the River to Bethlehem, after the famine ended: the story has changed. Bethlehem once again embodies The Bread Basket of the Ancient world. Ruth is no longer a Moabite, but as a woman of commitment. Naomi who self-identified as going away full/coming back empty; has been loved by Ruth's faith. The named man of this part of this story is no longer Elimelek "Israel's God is King" exiled to Moab; or "sickly" Chilion or "Going to die" Mahlon; but Boaz whose name is "Man of Strength and Property." No longer is Ruth following, Naomi sent Ruth into the fields to glean, redeeming left-overs.

The ancient world had as much poverty as we do today, but the Biblical Law provided for the needs of the poor differently. Different from the laws of Commerce, Supply & Demand; according to God: Creation is sufficient for everyone's needs. Many of you spend summers in Northern Michigan, and know that my family did, where we learned to water ski and sail, and I worked harvesting and processing cherries. One of the marvelous inventions in the years I worked there, was a tent like canvas tarp that wrapped around the trunk of a tree, as the shaker shook all the cherries off the branches to be sorted and pitted and frozen for pies. But for the first seven years, the trees were too tender, and the latter three years of life too weak to stand up to shaking. So workers would hand pick these smaller trees, hand-picking was the Biblical work of gleaners. Harvesters were told to intentionally leave some of the crop in the field, for the widows and the orphans and the poor to be able to feed themselves.

As a Pastor and Preacher in 2021, I want us to redeem the promise of Martin Luther in his 95 Theses of November 1st 1515... Utilizing the invention of the Printing Press, Martin Luther fought that parishioners are "a Priesthood of Believers." Explicit in Luther's demand was not only that we have Bibles available for you in the pews in front of you, but that you would be able to read, and to use your own minds to interpret the Word of God! Asking what are you willing to do for Redemption (?) those who read and handle the Bible are able to play a far more advanced game. If all we are allowed to do is to hear the Word read to us, we can only imagine images like: "David the Shepherd boy killed the Giant Goliath with a Sling shot," whereas reading the Bible for ourselves, using our minds, we can make connections between names/stories and think for ourselves what we believe! CONNECTIONS LEAD TO REDEMPTION.

As Boaz sat at the City Gate with Elimelek's nearer Cousin, there are nuances in this story. Were there other men who sat with them? 10 men of the Village... 12 including Boaz and the Cousin, is the number

12 important in the Bible? 12 Sons of Jacob, 12 Tribes of Israel, 12 Disciples of Jesus. Also, in sitting Shiva to remember the dead, the family member gathered 10 others, including the one being remembered as a holy community.

When choosing to give up all claim to Ruth and Mahlon's estate, what did the nearer relative do? He took off his sandal! Is there any other place in the Bible where someone takes off their sandal, renouncing all claim of redemption or responsibility? In the Gospels, when Jesus sends out the disciples. If they are not received, the point is not to provide a curse by dusting off your feet or shaking your sandal, but abandoning all responsibility and claim of redemption.

When the bargain was struck, Boaz Redeemed Ruth as his wife, the Witnesses had an Odd Affirmation: "May the Lord make the woman entering your house, like Rachel and Leah... and may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah." Often, as Christians we will elevate Sarah as the wife of Abraham who redeeming God's promise gave birth to Isaac when she was 80 years of age... but in Judaism, Abraham and Sarah's Grandson Jacob is the one who left the Promised Land going across the Jordan to marry Rachel and Leah from a different culture, and returning he was called "Israel" and these women gave birth to the 12 Tribes of Israel.

Those in Pastor Diane's Class on Jesus' Grandmothers should recall the reference to Tamar giving birth to Perez, is naming that Jacob and Leah's son, Judah took a Canaanite as his wife, who conceived 3 sons: Er, Onan and Shelah. Er married Tamar, but Er died, so as next in line Onan took Tamar as his wife, but Onan died. Not wanting to risk the life of his third son, Judah sent Tamar back to her own father. But wanting to redeem her husband's lineage, Tamar disguised herself as a prostitute to seduce her Father-in-law Judah. Religious believers are often thought to be morally pure and righteous, but here, Ruth is praised by the community for doing whatever it takes to redeem her promise to Naomi and to Mahlon. Redemption is not about the price, but what we are willing to do to redeem others.

I shared parts of these stories before, but when I went to South Sudan, I had no idea what I might encounter. When staying with friends you often take a house-warming gift, or something for their family. I sat with the Tribal Chiefs and described that what we ate for dinner yesterday is a consumable, but I hoped to do something to redeem a circumstance and gave him an envelope with \$300 in Kenyan Shillings. Their family went away to talk and the following day told me that their son had gone to Kenya where he became involved with a woman and he was in prison. This gift of redemption would pay the fine for him to be released to come home.

Two weeks later when I went to leave a woman came to me wanting something from America. All I had was a \$5 bill which in that they did not use American currency was worthless to her, but she took it. Two years later I returned to this Village and the woman took me by the hand and led me to her hut where she dug in the soil extracting this Snail Shell with the same \$5 inside.

15 years went by, and one of the refugees we had sponsored phoned, saying that he and his wife each were working alternate shifts and both were going to school. They also had five children, but had discovered her mother was in a refugee camp, who could come to serve as Nanny for their children, except they did not earn enough money to demonstrate to the US State Department that she would be provided for. So could my wife and I send a copy of our Tax Return to this official at the American Embassy in South Sudan. How many times have we all heard scams about sharing your banking information, your Social Security number or returning the fortune of an exiled African official? But we shared our information, and redeemed his Mother-in-law from a refugee Camp and she stood before the church describing that she believed she would never again see family, and we had redeemed her.