

Introduction:

- A. *Illus.*: Several years ago **Doug and Jamie Becker** were part of our congregation while Doug was at TEDS. Now he's a pastor in New Jersey. Jamie describes herself on Facebook as, "*Bio, adoptive, foster & autism mama,*" with four little girls. The oldest of those four, Jacqueline, who is deaf, had a big day on Oct. 1. It was her adoption day. As they prepared to leave for the courthouse, Jackie signed, "*It's gonna be the best day of my life.*" Jamie said, "*I think most of us started weeping at the part where the judge asked her if she understood what adoption was. She signed 'I know they love me forever, and I will get a new name, and they will adopt me as their daughter always.'*" Jamie made this sign for her: "*I am chosen, loved, adopted forever. Jacqueline Hope Becker.*" She kept clicking the heels of her fancy shoes, and signing, "*There's no place like home. There's no place like home.*"
- B. We've been studying an adoption story in the Bible as beautiful as that one, but with very different details. Her name was Ruth. **Turn to the book bearing her name.** She was from Moab, a nation so toxic with sin and treachery against God's people, that Israel was to have nothing to do with them. But Ruth married a wayward Israelite boy, and when he, his father, and his brother all died there in Moab, Ruth's mother-in-law headed back to Bethlehem, her home. Ruth and the other sister-in-law, Orpah, went with her. They loved that woman and they weren't going to leave her. But when she absolutely insisted, Orpah went back home to her people. Ruth wouldn't go. You can read what she said in **Ruth 1:16-17**, "*Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where*

you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.” That is not only a profession of loyal love for Naomi, it is also a profession of faith in Naomi’s God, Yahweh. The heart of that statement is, *“Your people will be my people and your God my God.”*

- C. Over the last four Sundays we’ve been through the four chapters of Ruth. Now for three Sundays we’re going to step back and look into this extraordinary jewel of a book from different angles, in an effort to see more facets of its beauty and to be more thoroughly shaped by God’s truth and grace revealed here.

One way of looking at this story is that it tells us what happens when someone—even someone as far from God as Ruth the Moabite—says, *“Your people will be my people and your God my God,”* and is adopted into the people of God. She was, in a sense, following in the footsteps of Israel’s father, Abraham, who also left his homeland and people because of his faith in God.

I. TO SAY, “YOU’RE PEOPLE WILL BE MY PEOPLE,” MEANS BEING ADOPTED INTO A FAMILY DEFINED BY OUR COVENANT WITH GOD.

- A. The people of Israel were not defined by their geography or even by their ethnicity. They were defined by their covenants with God. Binding promises; vows. When they were about to enter the Promised Land, Moses told them in Deut 7:6-8,

For you are a people holy to the LORD your God. The LORD your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession. The LORD did not set his affection on you

and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors that he brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the land of slavery, from the power of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

So that is the people Ruth took as her own. **Before Ruth said, “Your people will be my people and your God my God,” God had said, “I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God.”**

- B. Ruth became an Israelite by adoption. The word isn't used in this book, but that's essentially what it was. It *seems* that it was her choice but just as with Jackie Becker, as much as she wanted to be adopted, it was up to Doug and Jamie. So Ruth's adoption and ours is up to God. **Ruth didn't become an Israelite by marrying an Israelite man, nor by taking up residence in Bethlehem, but by resting her faith in the God of Israel who had been drawing her to him.**

So it is with us. Paul writes in **Rom 8:15**, “*the Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, ‘Abba, Father.’*” God's Holy Spirit brings those whose faith is in Christ into “sonship”, meaning into the full rights of God's heirs. We don't call God “*Father*,” just because we feel like it, but only because the Holy Spirit brings about our adoption. Then we really can cry out to God, *Papa, Father!*

- C. Ruth quickly learned something else about her new people. God's covenant with Israel meant that the people would care for one another in obedience to God. God's second great command was, “*Love your neighbor as yourself.*” On her first day when she went to field to glean, she began to learn what that meant. **When she met Boaz, it was almost**

as if God himself had come out to meet her because Boaz personified the *hesed* love of God for his people.

Boaz was the kind of Israelite they were all supposed to be.

First he took care of her there in the fields, making sure she was safe and that she even gathered extra grain to take home. Boaz knew of Ruth's relationship with Naomi, and he knew that he, too, was related to Naomi. Boaz was "*a man of standing,*" who honored the proverb, "*He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and he will reward him for what he has done.*" [Prov 19:17]

Then there was the extraordinary story of Boaz acting as their kinsman-redeemer. At his expense, he acted to preserve both the land and the line of Naomi's husband, Elimelek, even though Elimelek had left Bethlehem for Moab, and died there. It was the right thing to do because they were fellow Israelites, in the covenant with one another and the LORD.

We, too, are in a covenant with God and one another, through Jesus Christ. This congregation is not merely the other people who gather here like you to worship God. This is our family. We are bound by God's New Covenant with us in Christ. In that New Covenant, the parallel statement to "*Love your neighbor as yourself,*" is what Jesus said in **Jn. 13:34-35**, "*A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.*" We no longer have laws about gleaning. We simply have this: "*Love one another.*" We no longer have the kinsman-redeemer law. We have this, "*Love one another.*" **We are obligated by our love for the LORD and for one another to care for one another regardless of preference or price.**

D. There's another interesting thing that Ruth learned when Naomi's people became her people. By way of background, I haven't mentioned yet in this series that the Book of Ruth is read every year, by Jews everywhere, during the Feast of Weeks—the festival season God ordained during the spring harvest, the very time when this story is set. It is also known as Pentecost. Ruth isn't read then just because it happened at the harvest season. **It's a kind of harvest story.**

Remember how when Naomi returned to Bethlehem she said bitterly, "I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty." Later when Ruth was gleaning in the fields Boaz told his men to pull out some of the stalks of grain and leave them for Ruth. At the end of the day she took 30 lbs. of grain to Naomi, along with leftovers from lunch. Then after Ruth met Boaz at night at the threshing floor he loaded her up with grain again. Ruth told Naomi, *"He gave me these six measures of barley, saying 'Don't go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.'"* And then in the big ending, Ruth had a baby but the women of Bethlehem rejoiced saying, *"Naomi has a son!"*

When we are adopted into God's family, we become agents of God's grace to others. That's what Boaz was and that's what Ruth became. We become useful. We are even given spiritual gifts to bring something of Jesus himself to our service of others. Others are drawn to God by seeing how much—and how well—we love one another. Even our times of suffering can be repurposed by God to show his wonderful sufficiency and peace. Psalm 126 was sung by exiles returning to Jerusalem:

*Those who sow with tears
will reap with songs of joy.*

*Those who go out weeping,
carrying seed to sow,
will return with songs of joy,
carrying sheaves with them.*

Ruth and Naomi would have liked that song!

- E. Finally, Ruth became part of a great heritage. We'll look at that more in a couple of weeks but when Boaz and Ruth were married, people prayed that she would be like the great mothers of Israel, Rachel and Leah, and so she was.

We, too, step into a great heritage. As I mentioned last week, if it is a great honor for Ruth to be the great-grandmother of David, and even of the Messiah, is it not an even greater honor for us to be the Messiah's family. **Heb. 2** says Jesus is not ashamed to call us his brothers and sisters!

II. TO SAY, "YOU'RE GOD WILL BE MY GOD," MEANS WE ARE EMBRACED BY THE *HESED*-LOVE OF THE LORD.

- A. Ruth knew very little of Naomi's God when she arrived in Bethlehem—the very town where one day God the Son would be born as a human baby so we might all see and know God with us. In Ruth's day the Lord was mostly incognito.
- B. This little book reveals God's love through story. The key word in this book is the Hebrew word *hesed*, not only because it is used three times, but because it is demonstrated throughout the whole story. This book could be called *The Book of Hesed*. As we've said each week, this word means loyal love, kindness, faithfulness, mercy, and compassion. **Ruth learned God's love through his people, just as we do.**

C. Ruth learned something else about God. I've mentioned before the way the writer heightens the sense of **divine coincidences**. It "*turns out*" that Ruth chooses to glean Boaz's field, who "*just then*" came by to check on his workers, and Boaz *happens* to be from Naomi's husband's clan. And Boaz *happens* to notice Ruth working. Later, when Boaz determines he will speak to the first-in-line kinsman redeemer, Boaz sat down by the city gate "*just as the kinsman-redeemer he had mentioned came along.*" You can almost imagine God in the wings whispering, "*Cue What's-his-name. You're on!*"

Twice God acts directly in a way that people recognize his handiwork. One is when the famine in Bethlehem ended and **1:6** says, "*The LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them.*" Then, at the end of the story, the writer says of Ruth, "*the LORD enabled her to conceive.*" Remember, she hadn't been able to have children when she was married before in Moab.

As God's people, even when God works behind the scenes, we begin to recognize his fingerprints on our lives and these divine coincidences become the most familiar of miracles to us.

- D. While God's actions are often disguised by the ordinary, there are other ways in which he is everywhere. God's name, *Yahweh*, which appears in our Bibles as the LORD, in all caps, appears 16 times in this little book. It is God's covenant name, the name his people are to call him. And Ruth heard it all the time, reminding her of her covenant relationship with him.
- E. There's something else that appears a lot in this book. I'm not sure whether to call these blessings or prayers, but 14

times someone says, “May the LORD ...” or something similar. Let me show you:

- **May the LORD show you kindness ...**
- **May the LORD grant** that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband.
- **May the LORD deal** with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.
- **The LORD be with you.**
- **The LORD bless you.**
- **Blessed be the man** who took notice of you.
- **The LORD bless him!**
- **The Lord bless you,** my daughter.
- **May the LORD repay you** for what you have done.
- **May you be richly rewarded by the LORD,** the God of Israel
- **May the LORD** make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah
- **May you have standing** in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem.
- **May your family be** like that of Perez
- **May he [baby Obed] become** famous throughout Israel!

In each of these instances someone’s thoughts turned to the LORD, and they sought his merciful intervention.

That is how God’s people talk. We weave prayers and blessings into our conversations. Prayer is second nature to us.

- F. There is an especially beautiful moment in Ruth 2:12 where Boaz, having just met Ruth, blesses her. “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.” And so it was! In

saying, “Your people will be my people and your God my God,” Ruth had taken refuge under God’s wings. The Psalmist sang,

*He will cover you with his feathers,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.*

Conclusion

Jacqueline Becker was born into a terrible situation. Jamie told me,

When she first moved to us, she did not trust men, only me. The first week we had her, she ignored Doug when he’d tell her to come in for dinner. I sat down with her and said “I KNOW you have no reason to trust or love Doug as a dad, but I know you trust me. Can you please trust me that it’s worth giving him a chance? Please, for the next week, don’t ignore him, try to listen to him, see if he is someone worthy of your trust and love.” She agreed. Within two weeks, she decided not to call him Doug anymore but “Daddy” and she bought him this plaque for his office: “Any man can be a Father but it takes someone special to be a Daddy.”

Jamie speaks about these things in various places. She told me, *I often encourage audiences to try the same with God, if they’ve never given Him a chance as their Heavenly Father... to not ignore him, to listen to him, and to see for themselves that he’s worthy of their trust and love. Jackie had never known the love of a father and now she’s forever loved and adopted as we are.*

