

Sermon Topic: **A Long Time Ago in a Galilee Far Far Away** by Rev Lim Jen Huat

Sermon Text: **Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17**

### 1. A Long Time Ago

- Story of Ruth happened a very long time ago, i.e. more than 3000 years ago or 1200-1500 years before Christ, and far far away in a place about 8000 miles away. A time & culture that is alien to us and needs imagination to comprehend.
- Ruth 1:1 describes the situation then: “In the days when the judges ruled, ...”. Refers to the time of the Judges, a 200-year period after Joshua died and before King Saul, David, Solomon, etc. As mentioned often in Judges, “In those days, Israel had no king and everyone did what was right in their own eyes”. It was a riotous period in the history of Israel and the “Worst of Times” – when the people were unfaithful to God’s Law. The nation was without direction, and immorality and violence were rife.

### 2. Naomi’s Family Tragedy

- Ruth 1:1 continues: “... there was a famine in the land.” In addition to no government and no system, there was no food.
- The Israelites were meant to settle in the Promised Land, in the west bank of the Jordan. Questionable for the few tribes which settled on the east bank of the Jordan.
- Because of the famine, Naomi’s husband did what was right in his own eyes. He decided to leave Bethlehem and go south east to Moab, well outside of the Land of Promise.
- Moab was a nation which came from the incestuous relationship between Lot and his daughters. This move marked the beginning of the family’s tragedy.
- Despite the Moabites being a cursed and pariah race, Naomi’s two sons married Moabite women.
- As the tragedy unfolded, Naomi’s husband and two sons died in Moab, leaving the three women alone and childless.
- In ancient times, there was no conception of eternal life and resurrection of the dead. People lived on through their descendants. Without sons, the family line ended.

### 3. Naomi Returns Empty

- When Naomi heard that things had got better back home, she decided to return. Feeling it kinder to release her daughters-in-law and easier on her to take care of herself only, Naomi told them to go back to their own families.
- But Ruth refused to leave her mother-in-law, saying: “Where you go I will go, & where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people & your God my God. Where you die I will die, & there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you & me.” (Ruth 1:16, 17).
- Even though Naomi returned to Bethlehem with Ruth in tow, she was not consoled by Ruth’s loyalty. Naomi told her fellow villagers that she “went away full and returned empty” and to call her Marah (meaning ‘bitterness’) instead of Naomi (or ‘sweetness/pleasant’). Felt that God had dealt with her severely.

### 4. Ruth Gleans during Harvest

- Was time of barley harvest when they returned to Naomi’s old house in the village.

- In those times, there was the Law of Gleanings, which required richer farmers to leave whatever fell to the ground for the poor and destitute to glean after the reapers so that they could gather enough to eat for the day.
- Ruth chanced upon a field of Naomi's distant relative, Boaz. Boaz heard of Ruth's kindness to Naomi and showed kindness to Ruth, instructing his workers not to harm her and to leave more for her to glean.

#### 5. Naomi seeks a Kinsman-Redeemer

- Since she was getting old, Naomi wanted to find a kinsman-redeemer who would provide security for Ruth as well as continue the name of her husband and sons.
- This was an important practice at the time. A kinsman-redeemer was a relative who came to the rescue in situations like the following:
  - a) took responsibility to be the protector for a relative, e.g. a man married his brother's childless widow and fathered children so as to continue his dead brother's line
  - b) bought back land that had been taken away by a money-lender for unpaid debts
  - c) rescued relatives sold into slavery, or
  - d) avenged the killing of a relative, as in "an eye for an eye, a life for a life".
- Naomi told Ruth to lie at Boaz's feet on night of harvest feast and when discovered, to ask him to be a kinsman-redeemer. Ruth did as instructed and proposed to Boaz to take her as a spouse (Ruth 3:9).

#### 6. Boaz marries Ruth

- Boaz ended up marrying Ruth and bringing her into his family. Several things resulted from this union:
  - Despite her Moabite background, she was included as one of the Covenant people.
  - Ruth bore a son. Curse of barrenness was lifted and God blessed her.
  - Naomi was joyous again – had sons again & was rejuvenated.
  - They became ancestors of King David and thus paved way for coming of Jesus. Important for the history of Israel – best & greatest King in Israel came from this union. Eventually, Jesus came from lineage of King David.

### Moral of the story: God's Salvation Story

#### God: Faithful Redeemer

- Right from Adam & Eve, the Fall of mankind, God has been working out His Salvation Story. Continuing through Moses, Abraham, Isaac to the riotous time of the Judges, even then God was working out His Salvation Story.
- God has always been a faithful Redeemer, faithful to the Covenant and always at work to redeem His people. Made a Covenant and kept it, even though the people were wayward and unfaithful.
- Some of us today feel that we are living in the "Worst of Times" in our lives, where evil seems to be everywhere and people are doing things that are right in their eyes. Being on Ground Zero, we find it hard to see how we are part of God's Salvation Story. But, even in difficult times, God is always working in the background.
- Good Friday, when Jesus was tortured and crucified, appeared to be the "Worst of Times" but God was even then unfolding the Salvation Story even though He appeared to be silent and to have forsaken Jesus.

Boaz: Faithful Man

- Boaz was a faithful man in the period of the Judges when people around him were disobeying the Law. He was one man in a wicked nation but he did his duty as a kinsman-redeemer even though he was probably elderly and much older than Ruth. God still had a use for a faithful man, and through Boaz came King David & Jesus Christ.
  - In today's world, anyone like Boaz would be laughed at or ostracized by colleagues or community for being straight-laced & old-fashioned, or for not taking short-cuts in performing duties.
  - Persevere: you have a part to play in God's Salvation Story, even if senior in age and feel you want to make way for younger ones to take your place.

Naomi: God Heals & Redeems

- In the case of Naomi, we see how God heals and redeems.
- Naomi (and husband) made bad choices and mistakes – they were wayward and strayed from God's hand out of the Land of Promise – and reaped the consequences.
- Naomi returned home full of regrets for past actions but within a short time, she saw God's Salvation Story unfolding for her, giving her a future and hope.
  - Some of us have messed up big time and are experiencing the consequences.
  - But, God can turn everything around, can redeem and heal our condition.

Ruth: Grace of God

- As for Ruth, she started as an outsider and unable to come into the Covenant and fellowship of Israel.
- But by the grace of God, she found a kinsman-redeemer who took her into God's family.
- Although she had previously been barren, God blessed her with a son and she became the great grandmother of King David and through her lineage Jesus came for us. Ruth was a vital part of God's Salvation Plan.
  - Some may come to church but feel like an outsider, hardly a Christian because don't have the background or knowledge of the Bible.
  - Nevertheless, we have a Redeemer in Jesus Christ, whom God sent to rescue us.

Every one of them, going through different situations in the "Worst of Times" during the period of the Judges, became part of the Salvation Story of God. God was at work through them. Similarly, as we come to the Lord and consider the story of Ruth, we can see God at work because the God during the time of Ruth is the same God today, walking with us.