

Ruth 4:9-12

The guardian-redeemer said to Boaz, “Buy [the land] yourself [and with it acquire Ruth]”.



It's quite clear by now that Boaz had no legal responsibility towards Ruth. The 'goel' (guardian-redeemer) had responsibility to buy the land, but Boaz was not the goel and thus had no responsibility in the matter at all. So, why did he both buy the land and marry Ruth?

Was it, perhaps, that he had fallen in love with her? There's no real evidence of that in the text.

Was it, perhaps, that he was a citizen who wanted to be seen to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to curry favour elsewhere? Again, no real textual evidence.

It seem to be just that he was a good man, who wanted to do what was right. But this has some interesting consequences when a child comes along, but more of that later in the week!

Whatever the motivation, Boaz seals the deal for the land and, with it for Ruth. I wonder what it must have felt like to be treated like that, just an add on to a piece of land! It probably still feels like that for women in some of the world today.

The first of the final pair of blessings is given by the people and elders to Ruth, although she is referred to only as 'the woman who is coming into your House' and as 'this young woman'. It is an odd blessing, and the references to Rachel and Leah, and especially to Tamar and one of her sons, Perez (but not his twin Zerah), could be seen as mocking of the union, reminding those gathered that this also is an unsuitable relationship, which will likely end in strife. But perhaps the people have been won over by the efforts of the new arrivals and the mention of trickster figures such as Leah and Rachel (Genesis 31) and Tamar (Genesis 38) is a way of celebrating Ruth and Naomi's subversive, transgressive heroism.

Ruth and Tamar, together with Rahab and the wife of Uriah (Bathsheba), meet again in the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1). It's interesting to see a Moabite (a foreigner) in the genealogy of David, the absolute hero of the Hebrew people isn't it? By making visible these four foreign women, all of whom were placed in precarious situations, perhaps the evangelist was seeking to prepare the gospel readers for Jesus' alternative family.

Also notice the reference to Bethlehem and Ephrathah here. We will see those again in the story of the incarnation – the story of Christmas.

But what do I take as the key point from these two verses. Perhaps the whole idea that the life of faith is not simply about doing what the law requires, but about acting responsibly by going above and beyond the call of duty.

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