

Ruth 2. 17 -23**Belonging**

23 So Ruth stayed close to the women of Boaz to glean until the barley and wheat harvests were finished. And she lived with her mother-in-law.

Some of you may know that I live in a 'Marriage of the Roses'. (A very happy marriage, I might add!) That is to say that my wife is from Lancashire and I'm from Yorkshire. We're both proud of our roots and value the heritage that we are part of, a heritage that has formed us. Not only is that heritage part of us, its also an important part of our marriage; despite the history of conflict between the house of York and the house of Lancaster centuries ago it has not prevented us liking things about both Lancashire and Yorkshire, and their people.

When she was growing up my wife attended a Methodist day school in Leigh, Lancs, but sometimes worshipped in a Baptist Church. I was brought up in the Methodist Church, but confirmed in the Church of England. For each of us that background has helped to shape our faith and to shape something of who we are today. We met each other as students in methsoc (the Methodist Society) at Hull University and that common heritage has shaped our faith too.

There is a proper sense in which we are formed by the past, but not bound by the past. So it was with Naomi and Ruth. Naomi, the Hebrew, recognises the value in Ruth staying close to Boaz "He has not stopped showing his kindness to the living and the dead. ... That man is our close relative." Now that's interesting isn't it? Naomi (a Hebrew) says about herself and Ruth (a Moabite) 'He is our relative'. The book of Ruth contains some really interesting little details doesn't it? Here, Naomi is clearly seeing this foreign woman who has married into the family as 'one of us'!

This marks a real turning point in the story as Naomi learns that Ruth has gleaned in the field of Boaz and Ruth learns of Boaz's family connection. Even before learning Boaz's name Naomi blesses the one who has taken notice of Ruth. When she learns that it is Boaz, Naomi blesses God "who has not abandoned his living covenant obligation with the Hebrew people" and she tells Ruth that Boaz is a relative, a *Goel* – a guardian-redeemer, or family protector.

The Hebrew word for *guardian-redeemer* is a legal term for one who has the obligation to redeem a relative in serious difficulty (see Lev. 25:25-55). And we shall see how this works out for Ruth in a couple of chapters' time.

Despite her different ancestry Ruth is accepted as one of the people of God.

It doesn't matter what our background is, who we are or what we have been, God accepts us into the family, through the *Goel*, or *redeemer* par excellence, Jesus Christ. Whether our background is Anglican, Baptist, Methodist or right outside of the Church we are accepted by God!

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