

**Welcome:**

Good Morning,  
And welcome to worship with Hiram Christian Church.

We are a congregation striving to follow Christ in the ways of love,  
To cultivate a community of belonging,  
And to do our part of restorative justice in the world.

Whoever you are,  
And wherever you are on life's most holy journey,  
You are welcome,  
And you belong,  
Here.

Welcome here within this sanctuary,  
And from the sanctuaries of home.

Today, we will return to the book of Ruth to hear how it all ends,

From vulnerability into the strength and blessings of relationship;  
To journey and move together in hope and faith

There is much to gain and much to glean from the members of this story,  
And to hear what it may hold and offer to us this morning.

Welcome Church,  
Exactly as you are.

Would you please rise in stance and/or in spirit and join me in our call to  
worship?

**CALL TO WORSHIP:****PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE:**

We come this morning,  
Shaped by the days that have come before us,  
By our view of the days that are ahead of us,

And in this present state -  
 All of what is felt and experienced and carried is honored.

We bring our whole hearts into prayer,  
 Trusting that our God and this congregation are great enough to welcome  
 and receive it all,  
 Caring enough to meet us and accompany us.

This is a time for prayer for the self, our communities, and our world.

Are there any prayers you would like to name and offer this morning?

Amber Allred's mother - thursday

Robin: care for parents

Wisdom and grace

Margaret -

Lifts.

- As this is Father's Day, let us offer our prayers to the Fathers in our lives,
  - Offer prayers of ourselves in our relationship with our Fathers,
- Asking and praying that every good gift and grace will be added -
  - To claim and nurture, to heal and restore, to celebrate and give thanks for these ties and commitments.

### **Children's Sermon:**

**Planting without getting hands dirty.**

### **Prior to Scripture:**

So we have come through the story thus far,  
 When a famine came over the land,  
 Elimelech, Naomi, and their two sons left the people,  
 Left the land,  
 Took their wealth and set up in Moab where no one  
 would ask or expect anything from them.

But in a radical irony, they discover that a culture that does not ask or expect anything of us still takes from us...

There,  
Elimelech died,

Their two sons married Moabite women,  
But within years,  
They lost all of their wealth,  
And the sons also died.

Naomi told her two daughters-in-law to leave her,  
Take refuge in the homes of their families and they will have a chance to live a life that she cannot provide for them.

Orpah departs,  
But Ruth clings to her.

Ruth and Naomi return to the land near Bethlehem,  
It's been twelve years since she left...  
And the homecoming isn't much.

There is a place to reside, but there is no money for food...

So Ruth must take to glean from the fields,

And the culture among the Israelites has changed in those 12 years...  
Elimelech was not the only one to leave;  
And so now the culture is self-interested

Ruth is at risk of harassment or worse,  
But finds the kindness of Boaz as a shelter.

They meet and sense in one another a partner...

Naomi conspires with Ruth to set out and seduce Boaz...

She does,

And depending on your interpretation of matters;

They either stay up all night studying Torah,  
Or something else...

And in the morning...

Begin the work of redemption.

## Scripture: Ruth 4

So this is a story about the fragility of all things.

How a land can change from fertile to barren;  
 How a life can change from abundance to impoverishment;  
 How a culture can change from neighborliness to self-interested...

This is a story about redemption;  
     Of a land,  
     Of a life,  
     Of a people.

And there is a detail in this final chapter of the story of Ruth that brings forward something so very important for us to hear and receive about this work of redemption.

There are two distinct matters of redemption that come to Boaz here.

The first is the matter of land redemption that belongs to Naomi -  
     Elimelech's death and their sons' deaths left family land in name to her,  
     But she without any resources or strength could not invest money  
     or energy into working the land to make it productive.

    Without some intervention,  
         The land will either lay dormant  
         Or have to be sold to someone outside the tribe.

The second is the matter of yibbum - levirate marriage -  
     This is the responsibility to the family of the husband -  
     That if the husband dies, then it is the brother's responsibility to  
     care for the widow.

Elimelech had two brothers,  
     Salmon who is Boaz' father,  
     And Pelson Almoni, who is Boaz' uncle.

Salmon died,  
     Leaving the responsibility to Pelson Almoni,

And you may be thinking...

Well, Peloni Almoni,

That's a great name.

It's fun to say. Fun to hear.

Peloni Almoni,

(I want to say it with an attempt of an Italian accent)

Why don't we read or hear his name in the text?

And this is why,

Because when Peloni Almoni was given the chance to redeem Naomi's land,

And Ruth,

and Naomi too...

He didn't.

He walked.

He told Boaz that he couldn't risk taking on the extra costs of that land,

Out of concern as to how it might lessen the quality of life or inheritance  
for his kids.

It wasn't that he couldn't afford it,

It was that he didn't want to stretch.

He told Boaz that they're both marked -

They're stigmatized

Naomi left

Ruth is a moabite

Both of their husbands died...

It's a whole mess and he doesn't want to get involved.

And so Peloni Almoni,

Walks.

With one extra sandal.

But his name is omitted from the book.

Instead he is named and referred to as “So and so.”

He didn’t live up to his name,  
Pelsoni Almoni

He was also named “Tov,” which is the hebrew word for Good...  
He didn’t live up to that name either.

So he is “so and so.”

And leaves it to tradition to remember him as a cautionary figure.

But here is where the quiet subtext reaches a volume that we can’t ignore,  
That within this entire story of fragility and redemption

Of a land,  
Of a life,  
Of a people,

There is within every movement towards redemption,  
And every act itself,  
Risk.

Risk and sacrifice;  
Cost to the self...  
It is not clean, but inherently messy.

In every act of redemption,  
The redeemer risks themselves...  
They enter the fray and the mess...

From the beginning here when Naomi is left vulnerable and alone,  
Ruth risks herself to commit and stay with her -  
She risks herself to provide for her.  
Entering into the vulnerability and complications,  
Utilizing her power and skill for some good.

When we meet Boaz,  
He is out there trying to redeem the culture by greeting everyone with the  
blessing, “God be with you.”

He is out there giving shelter to the gleaners.  
 He sleeps on the threshing floor to prevent thieves from stealing.

He is risking himself in the redemption of the land and people,

And here again,  
 He risks stretching himself too thin  
 Risks associating with two women who the community has  
 stigmatized.

Because it is the good and right thing to do...

And we see what comes of all this risk and messiness and cost,  
 Is that there is a lineage,  
 Ruth to Obed to Jesse to David  
 And David on down the line to Joseph to Mary to Jesus.

We in the Church have some sense - some view - that the work of redemption is  
 a clean endeavor.

And that redemption can only be accomplished by a pure redeemer.

We have said as much when we assert that Jesus was without sin,  
 We have this view that only cleanliness can be godliness,  
 And only cleanliness can redeem -  
 Like some bleaching, oxidizing detergent or something...

But what we see in the story of Ruth,  
 And really what we see in the story of Christ too,

Is that the redeemers  
 Enter into the mess,  
 They get messy  
 They risk that stigma  
 Pushback  
 And sacrifice

And that the redeemers themselves,  
 Are not without blemish or pure,

They are as messy and complicated and flawed as the rest of us,  
 But they don't let that stand in the way of their commitment

This whole story is what some might call a "hot mess."

But it is a story of redemption;  
 Filled with redeemers  
 Who are not perfect,  
 But committed to the other  
 Committed to their God,  
 And that is more than enough...

Our landscape is not too far from the one inhabited by this cast...

Zoom out and look at the whole;  
 Or zoom in and look at the self...

There is a need for some redemption...  
 Towards wholeness and justice...

But here is the thing,  
 If we are more concerned or interested in our own purity;  
 If we are insisting that we can only be a part of some redeeming  
 effort so long as our hands can stay clean...

We're no better than old' "so and so."

We are meant to enter into the fray,  
 To lean into the mess,  
 To risk and accept the costs

To engage that which our souls know needs redeeming  
 In order to be - not the only redeemer - but to be part of that  
 endeavor.

If you want to be part of the redeeming effort to help bring the black sheep of the  
 family back into the fold,  
 You're going to have to risk the stigma of calling, visiting, sharing...

If you want to be part of the redeeming effort to help bring the community together,

You're going to have to talk with people on all sides of things.

Visit with and learn from them and accompany them - wanting good for them.

If you want to be part of your own redemption story,

You're going to have to return to the mess and pain and accompany it - perhaps for the first time.

Redemption

Risks the mess and sacrifice

It's going to cost you.

And.

What comes of it.

Is good and holy

Is of God

So this is a story about the fragility of all things.

How a land can change from fertile to barren;

How a life can change from abundance to impoverishment;

How a culture can change from neighborliness to self-interested...

This is a story about redemption;

Of a land,

Of a life,

Of a people.

It is not clean.

It is a hot mess.

And what we gain about the redeeming effort

And the redeemers

Is that they not only understood the need for redemption,

but were willing to take the risk of the redeemers

Committing themselves

Entering into the mess to accompany

All the way to redemption.

May we be willing to offer ourselves;

To risk ourselves;

To have our names be known

To commit to each other and our communities

Taking on the mess

Hoping and trusting that with our commitment

And the grace of God

We will all come through to blessing.

May it be so.

RISK THE MESS

## Notes of the text:

- Two pieces of land involved (Naomi and Ruth)
  - One to be redeemed through purchase.
  - One to be redeemed through marriage.
- Command/faithful to keep the land in the family/tribe - cannot go outside the tribe.
- Responsibility that “So and so” doesn’t take.
  - Ruth Rabbah - doesn’t want to acquire the stigma and shame (thinks that Naomi’s kids died because they took Ruth)
- The so and so - doesn’t want to stigmatize himself or his kids. (Rashi. 4.6
- **“Boaz went up to the gate and sat there and, behold, the redeemer of whom Boaz had spoken was passing; he said: Turn aside, sit here so-and-so. He turned aside and sat” (Ruth 4:1).** “Boaz went up to the gate and sat there and, behold, the redeemer of whom Boaz had spoken...” – what, was he standing behind the gate? Rabbi Shmuel bar Naḥman said: Even if he was at the ends of the earth, the Holy One blessed be He would have flown him and brought him there, so that righteous one would not be sitting in distress waiting for the matter to be settled. Rabbi Berekhya said: This is what two world greats, Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Yehoshua, expounded: Boaz did his, Ruth did hers, and Naomi did hers; the Holy One blessed be He said: ‘I, too, will do mine.’ “He said: Turn aside, sit here so-and-so [*peloni almoni*].” Rabbi Yehoshua says: Peloni Almoni was his name. Rabbi Shmuel bar Naḥman said: He was mute [*ilem*] from matters of Torah. He [Peloni Almoni] said: ‘The first ones died only because they took them, and I will take her? Heaven forbid that I take her, I do not want to taint my children, I do not want to mix dross with my children.’ But he did not know that the *halakhah* had already been introduced: “An Ammonite,” but not an Ammonite woman, “a Moavite,” but not a Moavite woman.