

**06.30.24 ~ Pentecost 6**  
**“How We Work Better Together”**  
The United Baptist Church, Annandale, VA

**Ruth 2:1-23 (NLT)**

*Ruth Works in Boaz's Field*

<sup>1</sup> Now there was a wealthy and influential man in Bethlehem named Boaz, who was a relative of Naomi's husband, Elimelech.

<sup>2</sup> One day Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go out into the harvest fields to pick up the stalks of grain left behind by anyone who is kind enough to let me do it." Naomi replied, "All right, my daughter, go ahead."<sup>3</sup> So Ruth went out to gather grain behind the harvesters. And as it happened, she found herself working in a field that belonged to Boaz, the relative of her father-in-law, Elimelech.

<sup>4</sup> While she was there, Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters.

"The Lord be with you!" he said.

"The Lord bless you!" the harvesters replied.

<sup>5</sup> Then Boaz asked his foreman, "Who is that young woman over there? Who does she belong to?"

<sup>6</sup> And the foreman replied, "She is the young woman from Moab who came back with Naomi. <sup>7</sup> She asked me this morning if she could gather grain behind the harvesters. She has been hard at work ever since, except for a few minutes' rest in the shelter."

<sup>8</sup> Boaz went over and said to Ruth, "Listen, my daughter. Stay right here with us when you gather grain; don't go to any other fields. Stay right behind the young women working in my field. <sup>9</sup> See which part of the field they are harvesting, and then follow them. I have warned the young men not to treat you roughly. And when you are thirsty, help yourself to the water they have drawn from the well."

<sup>10</sup> Ruth fell at his feet and thanked him warmly. "What have I done to deserve such kindness?" she asked. "I am only a foreigner."

<sup>11</sup> "Yes, I know," Boaz replied. "But I also know about everything you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband. I have heard how you left your father and mother and your own land to live here among complete strangers. <sup>12</sup> May the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge, reward you fully for what you have done."

<sup>13</sup> "I hope I continue to please you, sir," she replied. "You have comforted me by speaking so kindly to me, even though I am not one of your workers."

<sup>14</sup> At mealtime Boaz called to her, "Come over here, and help yourself to some food. You can dip your bread in the sour wine." So, she sat with his harvesters, and Boaz gave her some roasted grain to eat. She ate all she wanted and still had some left over.

<sup>15</sup> When Ruth went back to work again, Boaz ordered his young men, "Let her gather grain right among the sheaves without stopping her. <sup>16</sup> And pull out some heads of barley from the bundles and drop them on purpose for her. Let her pick them up, and don't give her a hard time!"

<sup>17</sup> So Ruth gathered barley there all day, and when she beat out the grain that evening, it filled an entire basket. <sup>18</sup> She carried it back into town and showed it to her mother-in-law. Ruth also gave her the roasted grain that was left over from her meal.

<sup>19</sup> “Where did you gather all this grain today?” Naomi asked. “Where did you work? May the Lord bless the one who helped you!”

So Ruth told her mother-in-law about the man in whose field she had worked. She said, “The man I worked with today is named Boaz.”

<sup>20</sup> “May the Lord bless him!” Naomi told her daughter-in-law. “He is showing his kindness to us as well as to your dead husband. That man is one of our closest relatives, one of our family redeemers.”

<sup>21</sup> Then Ruth said, “What’s more, Boaz even told me to come back and stay with his harvesters until the entire harvest is completed.”

<sup>22</sup> “Good!” Naomi exclaimed. “Do as he said, my daughter. Stay with his young women right through the whole harvest. You might be harassed in other fields, but you’ll be safe with him.”

<sup>23</sup> So Ruth worked alongside the women in Boaz’s fields and gathered grain with them until the end of the barley harvest. Then she continued working with them through the wheat harvest in early summer. And all the while she lived with her mother-in-law.

**Leader: These Are God’s Words of History and Wisdom.**

**All: Thanks be to God!**

### **Romans 12:1-8 (NIV)**

*A Living Sacrifice*

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

*Humble Service in the Body of Christ*

<sup>3</sup> For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. <sup>4</sup> For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. <sup>6</sup> We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith; <sup>7</sup> if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; <sup>8</sup> if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

**Leader: These Are God’s Instructive Words through Jesus and Paul!**

**All: Thanks be to God!**

**Please pray with me:**

Collaborative God, we thank you for another full week of rest, work, play, healing, grief, memories, joy, fellowship, vision, shelter, and healthy, good food. We also thank you for the legacy, leadership, and new work of this church and those organizations, like the Shepherd Center with whom we support, provide for others, and experience Christian partnership. We ask you for encouragement and blessings on all our work, leadership, and collaboration to share God's love and provision. Let us remember our mandate to spread the Gospel to those who do not know your Son, Jesus. Open these Scriptures to enlighten us and motivate us to step out of our comfort zones to work together to influence our world, and may my reflections be your voice heard today. Amen.

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Last week I shared excitedly about the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship General Assembly, seeing many Baptist churches working together on established mission projects, learning from one another's experiences, and even collaborating together to form new ministries or contexts. More stories will trickle out over the summer as I process that conference. So, we know that Baptists have for years and still do associate and work together to do more "good" in the world than any one church can do alone. Right? This week, we see in the story of Ruth how people came together to support one another in extreme circumstances of lack; and how in the Romans passage, we are encouraged to work for the Lord by remembering that by our belief, we are one body with many gifts. Those gifts we each have, especially if used for the church, can complement one another to spread the Gospel, share in offerings, missions, mentoring, and teaching.

Most of us know the story of Ruth, her mother-in-law Naomi, and her kinsman-redeemer Boaz, a good man of standing the Hebrew interpretation states. Ruth, remember, was a Moabite woman but Naomi was an Israelite who had moved back to Judah from Moab, due to the famine conditions, so both were considered "outsiders" in this new

community where the famine was over. In order to support her widowed mother-in-law and herself, a young widow, she went into the fields to glean (with servants and the poor) to gather enough left over wheat grain to make bread for them to eat. We see in the Scriptures that she works alongside the servant women for her own protection. Working together, they created systems of gathering more grain, and protected themselves from the unruly men doing the same work. Boaz spoke to his men to behave themselves and to leave her alone. Boaz knew she was family, so Ruth was invited to refresh herself with his water and food and to have lunch with him.

Although there are other elements to this story to be taught and many interpretations about their love and Boaz being Ruth's kinsman-redeemer, our focus today is on how God orchestrated the new relationship between Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz—all three of them had different gifts to offer this small community and to build a new fellowship. You see, the gleaning was good for the fields, the farmers, and the gleaners. Boaz' age, belief in Yahweh, social standing, and singleness was good for Ruth, while her vulnerability was good for Boaz and fulfilled his need for a wife and family. Boaz prayed that God would honor her fidelity and loyalty to Naomi, but little did he realize that he would be an instrument of God's design. There was another option, and there are always other options, but through God's and Naomi's wisdom to match Ruth and Boaz for matrimony and her practicality of selling her dead husband's land, Boaz bought the land and Ruth. Ruth became his wife, and bore him a son, Obed, who became the father of Jesse, the father of King David, making Jesus a shoot from this family tree.

We cannot foresee God’s plan for us or for this church, but we must be faithful to serve him as he is faithful to us, even in the hard times we occasionally suffer or if we lose our way. My sermon title “How We Work Better Together” is not meant to be a how-to book of steps to follow. The “How We Work Better Together” answer I was fishing for in this sermon and in these Scriptures is to focus on our faith and belief in our Creator God, his Son Jesus Christ, and to lean on the direction of our Advocate, the Holy Spirit.

The first step, the “what to do,” is to shore up your faith belief system; the “how” is what I teach every Sunday! By reading your Bible, practicing spiritual disciplines like silence and prayer, participating in Christian fellowship with strong believers, sharing your joys and sorrows with one another, offering to help one another in times of difficulty, sending a note or making that phone call to members and guests you do not know, and by keeping your eyes on Jesus—these are all ways we work better together. Even the short conversations before and after Sunday worship are helpful, but they are only a start. A couple of years ago, we studied spiritual gifts, and I ask you to recall what yours are.

The Romans instructions were from Paul, and think about it; after his conversion, he had community with Barnabas and Timothy, Onesimus, Lydia, and many other apostles like himself. Each had his or her own special giftedness with people, teaching, money, service, or encouragement. His letters are 28% of the New Testament! And much of his writings talk of how others and their gifts helped to spread the Gospel, because he was in prison much of that time! This passage demonstrates how we work better together by giving one another respect, encouraging

the gifts we each have, and putting them into practice. At the Shepherd Center lunch on Thursday, I did a Food Mission commercial, and God, Carol, and Elmer helped recruit Delores to be a new Food Mission Volunteer! She came over to us! That took 4 of us to bear fruit: God's prompting, Pam's announcement, Elmer's invitation, and Carol's details and explanations of her experience at the Food Mission. And at Venetta Tucker's funeral service, I met two new people and saw two people I hadn't seen in a long time! A NorthStar layperson and Aida B., a longtime member who's been gone for health reasons. These are some examples of divine interventions and human gifts and responses; we don't always see the end results like Naomi and Ruth, nor realize how important each person's input or experiences are to any given church situation. Remember, we are changing the narrative of The United Baptist Church! And that takes each of you serving in many different ways, so keep up the good work! Our metrics are improving: "look what we can do and are doing in our community, with God's help!" If you're not sure, then ask me to share. As Paul Baxley said at the conference: we will be **"asking new questions, embracing new ways of serving, imagining new ministries, setting aside old fears and rediscovering the incredible gifts they have been given to serve their communities."** We will be going through that Red Sea if necessary, so as they say in the movies, "Saddle up!" We are stronger as Baptists together; we are after all The United Baptist Church and Mission Center! Amen! ||

**Let us pray.** Dear Lord, we thank you today for these words of encouragement and motivation. Although newness and change are unsettling, they also strengthen us as your disciples. Please open our

hearts and minds to new ways to reach people for you. Let us thank you for our individual gifts that strengthen and unite the body of Christ. We ask you to embolden us every day to be the “*through*” people as we answer your call to work together. Thank you, Jesus, for it is in your name we pray, **Amen**.