

Well, hello, and welcome to Ponder by NorthernLife. We're having a conversation about the word of the Lord as it was preached to us on Sunday, and as we encounter it in our everyday lives.

Now, you might have noticed that you have a different long in your ears this week for this version of the podcast. In honour of Ruth, it is the girls takeover.

So my name is Stephanie, and I'm joined today by Melanie, and I'm joined by Virginia as well. There you go. Hello, everyone.

Hi, everyone.

So good.

Well, Jen, we might start with you. We heard about Ruth on Sunday. Give us a bit of a summary of the sermon.

Well, looked at it from through the lens of six little bits of the story.

So mainly stuck with the story and talked about it that way. And we looked at the idea of ruin. Then we had a look at return, revelation, redemption, restoration, and finally royal line.

But I suppose the big picture was looking at this pretty hopeless story and how the couple of women that are involved, the family, Naomi's family, Ruth, her daughter-in-law, were redeemed by this guardian redeemer, Boaz.

And the way that that links to our picture of Christ, of Jesus redeeming us in all the ways that he does.

Yeah. Yeah, for sure. Well, just sort of starting out, thinking about that place of ruin.

I mean, in the story, it's only a, you know, a sort of opening paragraph, but it just seems it goes from bad to worse. You know, when it rains, it pours for Naomi in this story.

I guess, why do you think God allows Naomi to get to that point of just devastation or that point of ruin?

Oh, it's such a hard question in lots of ways, because we, yeah, we look at our own situations and think, why did it have to be so bad often?

But I think that just thinking about the story, the fact that they had already left Bethlehem, and I think probably tried to maybe rectify some stuff under their own way of doing things.

Whether you agree with that or not, I think at the very end of where Naomi gets to is, she had to rely on the Lord. And that whole idea of her just hearing that there were better things going on in Bethlehem, there was hope.

So she really needed, that was her only hope, to look back at the one she believed in. And he was, he provided. So I think that sometimes the way we try to do things under our own steam, and as good as the intentions are, we just, it's beyond us.

So I think that all of those hard things just led her to a point of, okay Lord, they're my words, not Naomi's, but okay Lord, yeah, over to you.

Interesting, like God does provide, but just in the timeline. So yeah, so I feel like it just depends where we are in our story, right? Like we feel like God is not present or he doesn't care about us, but we just don't have the whole picture yet.

And then he still does provide. But I think it's also just like a pointer of the brokenness of this world. Sometimes things are just terrible.

And I don't think that's not about like God's love for us. And yeah, he's not going to just give good things to the people that he likes most. And he's also not a genie in the bottle who's just waiting to approve every one of our prayers.

So we are absolutely going to have very hard things happen in our life.

And we hold that intention with God's character of love, the good gifts he gives us, as I think it says in James, every good gift comes from above, and also the big picture of the redemption that has come and is coming.

Yeah, I think that helps in times of pain.

Yeah, absolutely.

Yeah.

And we see that in Ruth.

Yeah, definitely. I think that's so true in that we have, we do have a hope to cling to. She had sort of this distant whisper back in her homeland that there was hope.

But I think it's helpful for us maybe to remember when we are in that place that our hope is actually spelt out in much clearer terms in our Bibles.

And it can feel like a whisper when the pain sort of drowns out the truth, but it actually is much more a solid, an anchor for our souls much more than perhaps what Naomi had to cling to in that moment.

I think also it's good to look at the pain and it's easy to say here's a tragedy.

We read them all the time, but to actually look at the level of loss for her, I think we can relate to that sort of thing because often a loss is compounded or has been driven by other losses before it, just like hers.

So I think there's a realism in, even though you could say it's pointing us to our own story, there is a realism in that too that we do actually experience quite often, as you said before, one thing after the other.

And so there's a reality about that that we can relate to.

Yeah. Do you think that gives us hope or not?

I think it gives hope that even out of extraordinarily hard things, he is there and he's waiting and he has an answer that we can't even imagine.

Yeah.

And it all started with her just hearing that.

Yeah.

I think that's one of the most powerful things for me, that there was an indication that there was better from him and she looks toward it. And then life starts to open up. And that doesn't happen overnight.

I think that's clear in the story too.

Definitely. Yeah, definitely. One of my favorite parts of Ruth, and a passage that almost always makes me tear up a little bit, is Ruth's kind of declaration to Naomi with her saying, don't urge me to leave you or turn back from you.

Where you go, I will go. And where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God, my God.

Where you die, I will die. And there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.

I'm getting choked up now. It's just so beautiful. But I think just sort of reflecting on the sort of desperate love that Ruth has for Naomi.

How can we have a love like that? And how can we direct it in a way that's healthy?

I think it shows that even though Naomi was bitter and had had hard stuff for, was going through really difficult things. I think through that, that Ruth could see the god in her.

You know, she, Ruth, Naomi says to Ruth, you've shown such kindness to me and my sons, but you just get the feeling that that had to have been reciprocal. They were foreigners in the land of Moab. So, but these women married their sons.

There's just a lot of unanswered things that I think she implied that there was more of her belief and her belief for God in her than she imagined. And I think that's what Ruth sees and responds to.

So in some ways, I think she is responding to the Lord, not to Naomi. I love that. Yeah, to the Lord through Naomi.

Yeah.

Yeah, I agree.

Especially because when you look at what it's saying in chapter one of Ruth, your people be my people and your God my God. It's a declaration of loyalty, yes to Naomi, but more to, I think what Naomi represents, which is her God.

And what a beautiful picture of a mobile woman seeing through one of God's people, the goodness of God, I think, or seeing something, some glimpses of the glory of God, which then makes me think of, oh, that's what we should be as Christians, right?

Like people should be looking at us and literally being like, oh, I want your God to be my God. So, yeah, maybe that's the loyalty and the love that we're seeing is a reflection, Virginia, saying of God, shown through Naomi.

Also, how beautiful is Ruth? Can we just acknowledge that?

Oh, yes.

Yeah. But even the whole book.

Yeah.

Yeah. Cedric was saying to me on Sunday, he thinks it's the, after Jesus, it's the most beautiful story of redemption in the whole Bible. I think it's a lovely book.

Yeah.

Yeah. I think that's so true, like reflecting on the character of Ruth. She just is so, when she's described later as a woman of noble character, that's a completely earned description.

Absolutely.

She's so quick to obey, so quick to, Naomi gives her this, what seems to us as readers like a crazy plan.

And Ruth's like, okay, where are we going? Which is kind of amazing. I think Boaz is so the same, so the minute he's introduced, the way that his workers call out to him and say, Lord bless you, and he replies in similar fashion.

We know he's a wonderful, godly man. How can we be like them? What sort of things can we, what do you see in their characters that's something for us to admire and model after?

It's something that I wanted to talk about, but just didn't get there was that it is the Sermon on the Mount sort of thing, isn't it?

It's like they didn't become those people overnight. They were already like that. Their hearts were, the motives of their hearts were right.

So again, she just seems such a godly woman for somebody who's come late in her journey so far to faith, but has learned from somebody or seen, yeah, got in somebody and understood.

And I think people say that speech that you spoke about Mel, that's like her conversion or a declaration of her conversion of her faith. True. But yeah, I just think it's been a work of their hearts.

It's their character. It's not something that they are trying to be. Like we're taught by Jesus on the Sermon on the Mount.

It's like these are the qualities that we need to have, that we want to have to be like him so that we can act like him. We can't do the acting and hope that the other part will come the other way around.

The things that came to mind, I was actually thinking about this beforehand.

Weirdly, the word that came to mind when I think about this was actually responsibility, which I was like, oh, that's a weird word, because I was like, responsibility, I don't think is very glamorous, but I think, or especially Boaz, but we kind of

see him actually just own the responsibility that is on him. I'm not really sure how that plays out in our lives as individuals or as Christians, but I think we do have responsibility to certain people in our lives in the role we play in our

relationships. And also we have responsibility as Christians to live out God's mandate. So I wonder part of it is we can be inspired by the way they step up in responsibility, owning where we're responsible in our life.

And then the other thing I was thinking is, I don't really, we don't know exactly why their character is amazing, but as Christians with God's Spirit in us, that's what we can do with the fruits of the Spirit.

And when we look at like Ruth and Boaz and we see like love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, we can, with the work in the Spirit in us, we can show those characteristics.

And I think we help the Spirit and we participate with the Spirit when we do things like spending time with God, in reading the Bible and prayer and practice. And so we can all grow in those fruits of the Spirit.

Also, another side note is in a way, Ruth is also a redeemer character in the story, like not just Boaz, but Ruth actually, in some ways is part of Naomi's redemption. It's her loyalty at first that allows Boaz to be part of like redemption story.

So yeah, it's amazing the different roles everyone plays in that redemption.

Oh, and in some ways, I think Ruth and Naomi are just two sides of the one coin.

Yes.

They're a whole person together because there's the disappointment and the sadness and the anger, but there's also the, well, I've got to apply myself. I have to commit myself to the hard work. And I think Naomi's in that with her as well.

So they're separate, but they're joined in one character in a sense. Yeah.

Yeah, definitely. The big word for me is definitely obedience. My sort of notes and thoughts on this part of the Bible is, it's obedience everywhere.

As I say, Ruth, hearing this plan, she just does it. Boaz wakes up bleary in the middle of the night to a woman at the foot of his bed, and he immediately responds with grace and kindness and obedience.

He dots the I's, he crosses the T's, he checks everything, he makes sure it's right, gets the witnesses, everything is done to the letter. Obediently, no detail is missed. And I think that is something I so admire.

And to your point, it's the work done in the quiet, and it's the work done when no one sees it, that produces a person that responds in that way, because you're right, it's natural to them.

It's just that is the first reaction, because it's what they do all the time. So yeah, it's that practice that really pays off in this story, I think.

Yeah, it does. And I think you see that with the other Redeemer, it's so almost off the cuff. It's like, oh, you, Maria.

Yeah.

It's gonna cost me.

It's almost unthought through. It's just very much that's what's on the inside. Whereas we just see Boaz, this is in him.

Even the way he responds to her at night, there is another, but I will be there. If he says no, this is what we have to do. But if he says no, then we will get this done.

So honourable.

Yeah. I admire that. And it would think about application.

I even think like, I think often when we think about people we admire, or let's say like air quotes, as we say, Virginia, godly people, I think so often we look at people and we, because obviously we can only see their actions, not their heart.

And we think, oh, well, that's the way they are. So it's like, I can't be like them because like, I'm not a loving person, but they're a loving person.

Or like they're a generous person, but like I'm not a generous person, but we haven't seen the behind the scenes work that's gone into making them the way they are, the actions that we can see.

And I think that's encouraging for us as Christians on our spiritual journey to not count ourselves out, to know that God is doing a work in us and He can continue to transform us into likeness of Jesus.

And it's the behind the scenes work that matters.

Which is costly, to your point Virginia, that He hears about that cost. And I guess in some ways for Orpah, as well as a kind of foil to Ruth, that the cost of leaving her community and the cost of an uncertain future is too much for her to bear.

And she sort of turns back at that point. However, reluctantly, it's costly for us to do that behind the scenes work.

It takes something for us to get rid of the things that are holding us down to a certain way of living and setting ourselves free from that to pursue God's way. Sort of that, it's the taking up of the cross sort of thing.

And yet what you're saying about Ruth's moment of, you're sort of thinking of it as a moment of conversion, that speech, I think Ruth the Moabite sort of that, she dies there. She puts herself to death.

Yes, absolutely.

So that she can become someone new. And that there's something in that for us, I think.

Yes.

And she comes into her full identity because she does do that. That's so powerful that in laying herself down, she becomes somebody new and complete in a way that she couldn't have imagined.

Yeah.

Yeah. We have to die to ourselves.

Yes.

I just wanted to know exactly what that verse was. Maybe Galatians 2.20. I've been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.

The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Yeah, that's good. Sort of thinking about where the story ends up, your final point was about the royal line and the fact that through Ruth, Jesus' own bloodline is established, which is so amazing.

God really goes above and beyond in this story. It's not just their immediate security, it's then their future and then the future of all of us really, to the person who's struggling to trust God.

Yeah.

I think we've all been there. How can we let go of our version of the dream to allow God to give us something better?

Yeah. I think that's where it's about hitting rock bottom, isn't it? Because we're human and broken, we're sometimes even unaware that we're still trying to do things in our own strength.

So trying and trying, and I think that's what we see with Naomi's situation, that there's nothing more she can do. I think it is, you often hear that expression, I had to get to the end of myself.

I think that is true, that we have to get to the end of ourselves. The person has to discover that.

I think it's hard if you're walking alongside somebody, you can't tell them that, they have to discover it, but all you can do is be supportive and encouraging.

And I think that's where the power of our own stories, because if I'm with somebody, I don't want to say, oh, I'll tell you about Ruth.

That's probably not going to be helpful in that situation of their own desperation, but I could tell them a time when that's, it's worked out for me, when it's the appropriate time to share that.

But I think it is trying to say, God has been good to me, and I believe he'll be good to you.

Or if we're already believers, it's like, when has God, you know, John, I said it before, time and time again, when has he been faithful, remembering the times he's been faithful? Is it, do we really believe he is good?

And I think that's just, okay, I can take the next step. That's what it is. The people I've walked alongside, it's just trying to be there.

Somebody recently just going through a really hard time, it's like, I can't fix it, but I can be around. And I think it's important to realise we can't fix it for somebody else. And letting them get to that end of themselves, but still be around.

And that sometimes isn't that much fun. But that's okay. That's what we call, that's the cost of real friendship, godly friendship, I think.

Yeah.

Yeah. We can, I think sometimes we can point other people to hope or they have no hope. It's like almost like we get to hope for them.

Yeah, oh, absolutely.

And believe kind of it's like, well, even if you're struggling to believe right now, I will believe on like almost behalf of you.

I think that's really powerful.

That's something I've said just recently to somebody, you're not believing, we are believing and praying for you. And I think there's power in that. We know if we meet together and pray together, God hears that.

So it's true.

Yeah.

Yeah. And yeah, also, which is also why the Bible is amazing because it's the whole story of God's faithfulness, the big picture, but also his faithfulness in individuals' lives, like Ruth and Naomi. I think that can be very hopeful.

And yeah, just the knowledge of God's character, that God is good in his nature, that he is love, and that his heart is never for bad. His heart never desires our pain, but he can use our pain.

Yeah.

Yeah.

Yeah, that's true.

And when you ask for bread, he's not gonna give you a stone.

Yes. There's so much in our Bibles to help remind us of what he's like, what his character is like. And even in the times, as you say, when I can't see it, there is still a truth about who he is.

And I definitely can testify in my own life that there's something I thought I wanted. And it probably even to a certain extent made me happy, but I had to let it go so that God could give me something better.

And that just takes, it takes time and pain and frustration. But it's the pruning that then produces the fruit. And you get to enjoy God's much better plan, which is just so kind.

But there actually is something wonderful on the other side of it, not just that you got through it.

Absolutely, and I just think having a willingness to share our stories in those appropriate places is so important for whether it's in the moment or it's told and somebody remembers it at the right moment. Just, it's powerful.

Yeah. And if we live in community and we build relationships, also letting people know and wear the ones struggling, wear the ones in pain, or hopefully they already know because they know our story.

That's why we need to tell you what's going on, right? So that others can lift us up in that moment. Pray for us and encourage us.

Yeah.

I think it might be time for our palate cleanser question. A big theme in Ruth is the harvest. So I got to thinking, what would you like to grow and harvest in your sort of dream garden, if you're a green thumb?

This is a perfect question for me.

What don't I want to harvest? I dream of a flower farm. I really like dahlias and peonies, but also a veggie garden that I try, but a veggie garden that actually produces.

Yeah.

Vegetables.

Yeah.

I've recently, well, I'm nearly two years into a new place and I had a very traditional cottage garden. I've gone completely native. So I'm really into native grasses at the moment.

Low maintenance.

Well, they move in the wind.

They are just beautiful. So I've got some spots picked out that I just want some lovely native grasses that are going to move in the wind.

Oh, I love that. I think my dream is to have one of those little, like a little hobby farm, but the ones that where people can come and pick their own something.

Like we, a couple of years ago, went to a strawberry picking place and I was like, oh, it would be so fun to run a place like this and like have families come and pick strawberries and yeah, anyway, that's a very distant dream. But who knows? Maybe.

I love it. Maybe one day. I thought I might close just with a reading from Ephesians 20 and 21.

Just a benediction to go with you this week.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever. Amen.

Amen. Amen.