

Sermon Starter – Sharing the Harvest

Ruth 2

Making sense of the story of Ruth and Boaz is strengthened through understanding the Hebrew laws that put the overall health of the community ahead of maximum production. The most obvious law operating in chapter 2 is the one that forbade farmers from harvesting the corners of their fields or from picking their crops too cleanly. These leftovers were intended for the poor and the outsiders. Gleaning laws are repeated twice in Leviticus and are mentioned in Deuteronomy as well. What are the laws about gleaning in our culture? Are there any parallels?

Ruth is not only a Moabite (see Deuteronomy 23:3-6 to read of the prohibition against associating with them), she is a widow. Options for women were limited in terms of finding financial security. Prostitution was a viable option, but Ruth and Naomi chose to put their lives in God's hands. What are some of the ways we marginalize people today? Are there times you have been in an insecure place and God has provided more than you could have imagined? Substitute the name of an unpopular group in your area for the word Moabite. How does your understanding or experience of the text change?

Boaz goes beyond his obligations to provide some grain at the edge of his field. What are our obligations as a church to provide for the poor in our community? Are there ways in which we keep people poor? What other ways are people "poor" in our church besides financially? How do we respond to them? Boaz uses the term *hesed*, which means "loving kindness." It is often used in reference to the covenant between God and God's people. He uses an image of God from Psalms 36 and 91 —being under the wings of God. How are we sheltered under God's wings?

This sermon would lend itself well to a long monologue from the point of view of one of the characters: Boaz, Naomi, or Ruth.

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