Short story: Ruth – beautiful – clever – brilliantly written – ancient story.

* Tragedy – hope – love - /theology mentioned at all – but whole story abt God’s sovereign hand at work in the everyday events of ordinary ppl.
* N + DiL R - plans – hopes – dreams: All failed. Life has been bitter.
  + Arrive 1:22 in Bethlehem – barley harvest beginning
  + sense: undoing famine of 1:1 - symbol of new hope.
* And there’s a new character on the scene.
  + A man of standing **v1** – impt man – good man – Boaz.
  + Meant to feel hopeful for N&R.
* 4 scenes. So far focused on N. Shifts today to R.

**Scene 1 (v2-3)**

R&N conversation – need food.

* Stress: how vulnerable these women are.
  + N: no family. R: foreigner w no family – refugee. From Moab – trad enemy.
  + /”Ruth” – Identity: “Ruth the Moabite” (v2,21) – “the Moabite from Moab” (v6) – herself: “foreigner” (v10)
    - That’s how she sees herself – that’s how everyone else sees her. Foreigner. /belong.
  + Malawi – STM – back of truck – kids “azungu[[1]](#endnote-1)” – “white-face” - /harm – but /way to make someone feel welcome. “Hey look everyone: someone different to us!”
    - Reckon that’s how R felt. Even though she’d pledged herself to N – to this ppl – their God… She was different and everyone knew it.
  + Those kind of feelings /unusual: /fit in.
    - Similar stories heard in many foster homes – women’s refuges – refugee camps – universities – new workplaces. Qns of identity – where do I fit in? Some here know.
* Back in Ruth’s day: refugee - /social services - /foodbank. Poor. Tough.
* But at least for R it was harvest time. Best option – poor person – gleaning:
  + **v3** So she went out, entered a field and began to glean behind the harvesters.
    - Explain
* God’s Law – OT – provided for poorest of poor. Show: something beautiful in God’s provision for the most vulnerable[[2]](#endnote-2):
  + **Deuteronomy 24:19** When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands[[3]](#endnote-3).
    - Same thing for olive trees – grapes in vineyard.
    - Leave some behind - /try and get it all.
  + Think: odd way to provide for ppl. /efficient. Why not just harvest it all – then give some away? Or sell some: given them cash?
    - That’s our instinct – our culture. Poor ppl: throw cash at the problem. Tax – govt sort it. Charities – give money – let them sort it.
  + But God’s law is visionary – stunning in its wisdom.
    - If you are in need - /want charity really.
    - Charity makes you feel like you are less – a handout from someone more privileged: Makes you feel smaller.
    - Better way in B:
  + Instead:
    - **Dignity:** work – you have value – you can contribute – good: mental health. Done s/t today.
    - **Community[[4]](#endnote-4):** encouraging the poor to work alongside the harvesters – personal contact between haves & have-nots. Work alongside – interaction – builds community – empathy – rel. What better way to integrate vulnerable ppl into soc rather than isolate them.
    - Gleaning is a kind of hospitality – inviting strangers in to the community.
  + Met several asylum seekers - /know a single British person – one lady: only time speaks English: “thanks” to bus driver.
    - Feelings of isolation so common among asylum seekers. /Work. Mental health problems v common – v isolated - /part of community.
    - Those who are part of a ch – so so blessed!
* Consider today: How can OT model of gleaning inspire us to be better at welcoming strangers into our families – natural – spiritual. Hospitality.
  + That’s what hospitality is: helping strangers become family.
  + Obv - /have people chasing after combine harvesters! But principles same: dignity – community. Re-work that for today.
* /money – or food. Things like Foodbank – great job – help ppl in a crisis. If you give: bless. Only v beginning of Biblical hospitality.
  + How much better to actually get to know someone – give them a community around them – give them a sense that they are useful – contribute.
    - Culture: writes off all kinds of ppl: addicts – mentally ill – sex workers – foreigners – poor.
    - /do that in ch: You matter to God – made in his image – whoever you are – whatever done – invite you to come and discover this God.
    - If you feel like /fit in – welcome!
  + That’s the challenge for church – for CU: how do you give strangers God places in your path dignity & community?
* Verse from NT: **Galatians 6:10** as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. Highlight!
  + Tempting read “As we have opportunity” as… “when you can” – stars align – work pattern – kids – then I’ll start showing an interest in ppl /know.
  + Better: “when you see the need” – that’s the opportunity!
* Getting away from story: See how pans out for R:
  + NB: foreigner – fatherless – widow. All 3!
* So R goes out to find a field to glean in.
  + **v3** As it turned out, she was working in a field belonging to Boaz
    - “As it turned out” – meant to think: something going on here! Is it random coincidence??? No chance.
  + Coming together of radical hospitality and God’s sovereignty. He is bringing things together.
    - N:/realise – R:/realise – B:/realise!
    - But G is at work!
  + See: when you do your little act of kindness – hospitality – meal – coffee – phone call – you don’t know what the Lord might be doing in that person already.
    - To you: seems v small – but in his sovereign plan – might be the very thing they are looking for – sign they are hoping and praying about.

**Scene 2 (v4-6)**

Boaz: wealthy landowner – godly man – single.

**v4** Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem

* Lit: “Behold: Boaz from Bethlehem” – look! See what God is doing!
  + So R just happens to be working in this particular field and hey – would you believe it – Boaz himself turns up!
    - Just the right time – in just the right place.
    - God is at work.
* Opening words to everyone: The Lord be with you!
  + Saying about Boaz? /forget: short story – every word counts. Meant to think?
    - Man of God – spiritual man.
    - Single ladies: this is the guy you are looking for.
  + Briefly say something about dating:
    - Some single Xn ppl think: want someone who will pursue me – s/o desire me – want me – love me – care for me.
    - No! You want s/o who will pursue God!
    - Even more attractive. Going in same dirn. Spiritual = sx.
* And B notices R. To foreman: Who is the young woman over there?[[5]](#endnote-5)
  + Reply: the Moabite who came back from Moab with Naomi.
  + Foreman: /name – just a foreigner – her identity.
    - Might reasonably expect a wealthy landowner to show no further interest in this obviously poor foreigner.
    - Allowing her to glean in his fields already. Done duty.

**Scene 3 (v8-16)**

* Private conversation – B & R. Addresses her:My daughter. Saying?
  + Respectful - /oi you!
  + He’s obv a lot older – old enough to be her f[[6]](#endnote-6).
  + Kind of rel he’s going for.
    - /worry - /scared - /dribbling – dirty old man.
  + Biggest thing: welcome in! Family!
    - Treat you like family!
    - Contrast to foreman: Moabite from Moab **(v6)**
  + Radical hospitality!
* Look at the way he treats her:
  + Don’t go and glean in another field
    - Stay in my fields. /feel you have to move on. Please stay.
    - That’s a good welcome! Ppl often wonder: am I really welcome here? Are they just being polite? /nuisance - /hassle for them. No: please stay.
  + Stay with the women who work for me.
    - /feel you have to separate yourself – chat to them – make friends – find a community.
  + Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the women.
    - Saying: glean – work hard – find some dignity in working to provide for yourself.
  + I have told the men not to lay a hand on you.
    - /everyone likes new ppl – foreman – Imagine some wanting to chase her off:
      * get out of our field - coming over here – taking our jobs & stealing our crops!
  + whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled
    - When we think of hosp – think of food & drinks. Welcoming strangers is much broader than that – but he provides that too.
* Ruth: **v10** At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She asked him, ‘Why have I found such favour in your eyes that you notice me – a foreigner?’
  + Isn’t that the natural response when someone is radically kind to you? Just wow.
    - /forget: she is a foreigner – he /owe her anything.
    - All he had to do to comply with the law: leave some barley behind.
  + This is radical hospitality. Overwhelming kindness. Grace. This is where hospitality connects w gospel.
* Isn’t this how God treats all who come to him?
  + Strangers to him – enemies of God because of our sin – yet though J – God welcomes us in
    - /hold us back – edges – Islam: /approach God – distant.
    - God of the B says: come – draw near – invited into a family. Child of the Living God.
  + Boaz: s/t beautiful to R: **v12** under whose wings you have come to take refuge.
    - Saying: you have come to take refuge under the wings of YHWH – God of Israel.
    - Beautiful picture of coming to faith in the God of the Bible: chicks – baby birds – under wings. Protection – care. More: family! Adult bird /care for someone else’s young.
* This is where we see the story of Ruth & Boaz fading into the background – see that it just points to a far greater story.
  + When you come to the God of the Bible – lay all your sin – shame – failure – at his feet - /hold you at arm’s length – gathers you in – as his own beloved child.
  + T: love – F -> S. Invited into family – share in that love w S.
* Cross: where sin is atoned for so that sinful ppl – washed – cleansed – welcomed in.
* Challenge:
  + Have you come to this God – laid all your sin at his feet: sorry – starting point.
  + Following a while: live out that radical hospitality to other ppl.
  + Quiet: think – respond.

Resources:

Duguid, Iain. **Reformed Expositional Commentary: Esther & Ruth.** P&R, 2005.

Ferguson, Sinclair. **Faithful God: An exposition of the book of Ruth.** Bryntirion Press, 2005,2013

Hubbard, Robert. **The Book of Ruth (NICOT).** Eerdmans, 1988.

Kandiah, Krish. **God is Stranger.** Hodder, 2017.

1. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mzungu> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. These insights are largely gleaned (ha!) from Krish Kandiah’s wonderful book, “God is Stranger” [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Also Leviticus 19:9, 23:22 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Krish adds “memory” to the list, with reference to Deut 24:22. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. He actually asks who Ruth belongs to. Maybe he assumed Ruth was a servant of someone. She was clearly poor, so maybe this is not an unreasonable question. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. See also 3:10 [↑](#endnote-ref-6)