



river west church

People of Refuge

Ruth 2:8-23

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The book of Ruth is the quintessential love story of the Bible. Think about it. What other book in the Bible features a damsel in distress, a heroine who saves the day, and a happy ending? Although Ruth's story has all the makings of a "happily ever after" tale, the author intentionally includes several not-so-happy elements. Before anyone falls in love, there's a bitter funeral. Before there's any roasted grain, there's nothing but empty cupboards. Before there's any rejoicing, there's an inconsolable widow. Before any rays of light break through, there's a lot of darkness. Instead of glossing over unsettling details in this story, the author puts them front and center. For example, twice Ruth is warned not to wander away from Boaz's field in order to glean in another field. Why? So she won't be sexually assaulted (2:9, 21-23). Now, if the book of Ruth was written to tell a nice little love story, you'd think that details like this would be left out. And yet they're not. Because this story is not primarily about finding romance—it's about finding refuge. This is the power of Ruth's story. It unearths our need for refuge as we read it. This morning, as we open this story together, we will discover what it means to know a God of refuge, to have a place of refuge, and to be a people of refuge as a community.

Knowing a God of Refuge

If the book of Ruth teaches us anything about who God is, it's that He's not an unsentimental deity who rules the universe from afar. Nor has the God of the Bible left us to deal with the harsh realities of life on our own. No! As the Psalmist insists, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Ps 46:1). The beauty of the book of Ruth is that it allows us to see this God of refuge show up in the lives of two hurting women. For Ruth, a woman who grew up believing in bloodthirsty Moabite gods like Chemosh, the idea of a loving God who cares for people must have been a foreign thought! And yet, when she meets Boaz, he prays over her and blesses her in the name of YHWH—The God of Israel who wraps His wings around His hurting people (2:12)! Ruth is overwhelmed by the kind, comforting words she hears. Why would God want to wrap His wings around a woman with nothing to offer? And yet He does. Not only in Ruth's life but Naomi's as well. As He does, the bitter pain and loss they've experienced together gives way to praise! How can they not praise a God "whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead" (2:20)!

Finding a Place of Refuge

When Ruth meets Boaz she's not only introduced to a God of refuge, she's welcomed into a community of refuge as well. Listen to how the author describes this safe, loving community: "And at mealtime Boaz said to her, 'Come here and eat some bread and dip your morsel in the wine.' So she sat beside the reapers, and he passed to her roasted grain. And she ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over" (2:14) I seriously can't imagine a better description of what kind of community Christ's church ought to be. A safe, loving place where people eat and enjoy Jesus together until everyone's belly is full. May God help us be this kind of safe, loving community - a place of refuge where everyone is welcome around the table!

Being a People of Refuge

Although Boaz prays that God will love, care, and provide for Ruth, the truth is that he is the answer to his own prayer. Think about it. The only reason Ruth was welcomed into a safe, loving community was because Boaz was a safe, loving man of God. As an employer, he instructed his workers to be safe and loving toward Ruth as well. As a family member, he sends Ruth home with enough food to share with Naomi. Which makes one wonder as we read this story; "What if the way God wraps His wings of refuge around us is through relationships with one another?" If this is true, then we must be willing to allow Jesus to make us into people of refuge. This will not happen with our power. Rather,

God will transform us into people of refuge as we come to Jesus and admit our needs. If we are willing, He is willing to be our refuge today (Luke 13:34)!

***Resources:**

Do you need a place of refuge at River West Church? Are you wondering if there is a safe place to share something you're struggling with? There are a number of resources, classes, and groups at River West Church where we, as broken people in need of refuge, can come. If you are interested in any of the resources below please send a confidential email to chris@riverwest.org with the word "refuge" in the subject line and one of our pastors will contact you.

- **ARMS**—A safe community for those dealing with domestic violence and abuse (www.armsonline.org)
- **Mending The Soul**—A safe community for those wishing to understand and heal from the effects of abuse and sexual brokenness (www.mendingthesoul.org)
- **Pure Life Alliance**—A safe community for men, women, and families dealing with sexual addiction and pornography (www.purelifealliance.org)
- **Counseling**—At River West Church, our pastors work alongside an amazing network of Christian counselors that help others dealing with addiction, abuse, and assorted trauma.