

**SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSONS**  
**Commentary by Michael Sigler**  
**March 28, 2010**

**Acceptance in Community**

Ruth 2:5-12 & 3:9-11

**Key verse: “And now, my daughter, do not be afraid, I will do for you all that you ask, for all the assembly of my people know that you are a worthy woman” (Ruth 3:11).**

Raleigh Washington, a black pastor, added a light touch to the serious subject of race relations when he said to a Promise Keepers rally: “When I was born, I was black. When I grew up, I was still black. When I go out in the cold, I’m still black. When I go out in the sun, I get more black. When I’m sick, I’m black, and when I die, I’m sure I’ll still be black.

“But I found out that when white people are born, you’re pink. When you grow up, you become white. When you go out in the cold, you turn blue. And when you stay out in the sun, you turn red. When you’re sick, they say, ‘You look green,’ and when you die, you turn purple. Now, what I want to know is why do they call blacks ‘colored people?’”

The appreciative response of the predominantly white audience was indication of their need to laugh at an issue that has too often been a sad, divisive problem—the issue of race relations. It is not only race that divides people. Social status, economic class, political viewpoints, national origin, even theological positions can be sources of divisiveness and exclusion.

Our Biblical faith speaks to the human tendency toward prejudice and exclusion. In fact, the ancient story of Ruth demonstrates that God’s kingdom is open to people who might be considered outsiders. Ruth, you will remember, was a Moabite, and the Israelites of that time did not normally “mix” with Moabites.

So, in this week’s passage, we find Ruth “gleaning” in the fields of Boaz, hoping to gather enough leftover grain to feed Naomi, her mother-in-law, and herself. Boaz sees Ruth in his field, finds out who she is, and shows kindness to her, saying to Ruth: “Now listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. Keep your eyes on the field that is being reaped, and follow behind them. I have ordered the young men not to bother you. If you get thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn” (Ruth 2:8-9).

The relationship between Boaz and Ruth develops further as we learn that, as a relative of Naomi, Boaz can fulfill the ancient Hebrew role of “kinsman redeemer.” This meant that when a family suffered loss of their property, the nearest kin had a responsibility to pay off the debt. Also, if a woman lost her husband, the nearest kin was obligated to help provide for her and her family.

In the Book of Ruth, Boaz eventually buys back Naomi’s land for her and marries Ruth. Clearly, Boaz does this out of love, not merely as a duty. So, the Book of Ruth is a great love story. But it also demonstrates that God’s kingdom reaches beyond the barriers of culture and class that often divide people.

Boaz has an important role in overcoming such barriers, as he demonstrates a kindness toward Ruth, the Moabite, a kindness that grows into love. In this story, Ruth exemplifies what Dr. Martin Luther King meant with his well-known statement that people should be judged “not by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character.” Ruth’s *loyalty*, *strong work ethic*, and her *devotion to God* are some of the virtues that Boaz admired about her:

1. **Loyalty.** Boaz says to her: “All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me” (2:11).

2. **Work ethic.** When Boaz inquires about Ruth’s identity, his supervisor in the harvest field tells Boaz: “...she has been on her feet from early this morning until now, without resting even for a moment” (2:7).

3. **Devotion to God.** “...your people shall be my people, and your God my God” (1:16).

Ruth demonstrated such admirable strength of character that Boaz said of her: “...all the assembly of my people know that you are a worthy woman” (Ruth 3:11).

So, we see in Ruth, a woman of strong, godly character. We see in Boaz a man of kindness and openness, who is able to see beyond cultural prejudices to the “content” of Ruth’s character.

Still, one might wonder how the inclusive nature of *God’s kingdom* fits into this simple love story. Here’s how: Ruth and Boaz marry. They have a son together, named Obed. Obed becomes the grandfather of the great king of Israel, David (Ruth 4:7). And, through Obed, Ruth—a woman from a culture despised by the Israelites of her time—becomes an ancestor of our Lord Jesus Christ! (Luke 3:32).

This ancient love story of Ruth demonstrates that in God’s kingdom, barriers of prejudice—barriers that exclude the “outsider”—are to be overcome. In the coming of Jesus Christ into our world, such barriers are done away with:

“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:26-28).

**“Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all” (Colossians 3:11).  
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