

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one in whom we trust and have our life and breath, Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, amen.

Do you believe in coincidence? Leroy Jethro Gibbs formerly the main character on the long running hit TV show NCIS doesn't... Gibbs, for many years was the lead investigator of his NCIS team. Over the years he revealed many rules to follow when investigating a crime. Rule number 39 is, "There is no such thing as a coincidence." If you're a non-believer or an unbeliever in the power and majesty of God then you might say that almost everything that happened in today's scripture reading from Ruth was a coincidence. If you're a believer and a person of faith, then you can easily see the hand of God working in and through Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz.

Some might say it was a mere coincidence that Ruth happened to come to the field belonging to Boaz, just as he was arriving from Bethlehem to oversee the harvest of barley. A few years ago I might have thought the same. Then I started watching NCIS and I learned there were no coincidences... I the Time To Revive movement that came through Darke County a few years back I learned a different way of looking at seemingly random events. Through NCIS I heard Gibbs' rule 39, "There are no Coincidences," and I learned a new term from my Revive friends. That term is Divine Appointment. Divine Appointments are not coincidences... They're appointments set by our Father in Heaven.

Here's what I mean... In August of 1998 PJ and I, along with three children rolled into town. Our first stop was the base 24-hour lodging and reception desk. We soon discovered there were no available rooms on base and the airman at the desk gave us directions to a hotel over near the Beaver Creek Mall. Since it was still morning, it was too early to check in, so we also asked for directions to Base housing. We wanted to at least get a glimpse of the housing area where we would soon be residing. On our way to look at the housing area we somehow made a wrong turn. Instead of turning onto Kaufman Road we turned onto Dayton-Yellow Springs Road. Before we knew it, we were passing Abiding Christ Lutheran Church. We decided to come back on Sunday to check it out. That was God, setting a divine Appointment for me and my family. We did return to Abiding Christ and found it to be a very welcoming congregation and we still have many friends we met there. It also turned out that the lead pastor was on the Southern Ohio Synod Candidacy Committee. Pastor Craig Fourman became my mentor and a huge advocate, helping me all throughout the candidacy process and even arranged my internship at First Lutheran Church in Xenia. So, was that wrong turn a coincidence or a God inspired divine appointment? I know where I stand...

What is a divine appointment? For one thing they show us how God works in the world. They may not be overtly miraculous, but the hand of God can be seen. Sometimes God works through mighty acts like parting the Red Sea or a

flash of lightning that heals a baby's heart. God can and does display His power and majesty in these supernatural miracles. These kinds of miracles are rare and we shouldn't grow too dependent on them. On the other hand, God also works in the gaps and margins of our lives. These small miracles may go unnoticed or be mistaken as coincidence.

God turned Ruth's decision to go out and work in the field, gleaning barley, into a life altering experience. Even in this story about how God has blessed this foreigner we read words of coincidence. In verse 3 it says, "As it happened, she came to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech." In verse 4, "Just then Boaz came from Bethlehem..." These two verses make it sound an awful lot like mere coincidence. Don't be fooled. Ruth's decision to find employment demonstrated her faith in the God of Israel. Naomi's blessing of her decision equally showed faith that God would not only provide for them in terms of food and a future, but that God would also protect Ruth from others who might see her misfortune and take advantage of her or abuse her. Instead of falling into the hands of jealous workers or lustful young farm hands, she meets a kinsman of her father-in-law, Elemilech.

Boaz was a man who had made good in his life. He was a rich landowner who employed many servants. He wasn't an absent boss, but one who obviously kept tabs on things around the farm, as well as keeping up on all the local gossip.

When he saw Ruth in the field he had already been told her story, how her loyalty to Naomi had brought her from Moab to Israel and how she was working hard to, at least, keep a subsistence life for her mother-in-law. Since Boaz was somehow related to Elimelech, he felt a calling to help the two women. Boaz obviously felt thankful to God and grateful for all the wealth and land he had been given. He considered all of it a blessing from God and out of a grateful heart flowed much generosity. The Law of Moses only directed the rich landowners to leave the corners of the fields and whatever happened to drop on the ground for foreigners, widows, and orphans. Notice instead what generosity Boaz displays toward Ruth. He advises her to stay close to the other women servants and to glean with them in his fields only. Next he invites her to drink from the water that his young men servants have drawn from the well. That alone was a very special life-giving gift. Then he instructs those young male servants to allow Ruth to take handfuls of grain right out of their hands... From their sheaths. Boaz was indeed a generous, grateful, loving, man of God. His gifts to Ruth and Naomi were real life savers! Meeting Boaz out in the field that day was certainly a divine appointment for Ruth!

Another divine appointment happened to me when we were living in Alaska, just before moving back here to Ohio. At that time, I was totally miserable at my job. I was working well over 12 hours per day, seven days a week and getting nowhere. I was not satisfied with what I was doing and I was extremely frustrated.

Just then the Lutheran Chaplain who had been our Pastor on base got orders to Barksdale Louisiana and they were replacing him with a Baptist preacher. PJ had noticed there was a Lutheran Church on the road where the school where she worked. We decided to give that church a try. On our very first Sunday at our new church, the pastor's message was from the 21st Chapter of John. It was the story of the disciples fishing all night and catching nothing. In the morning, the resurrected Jesus calls to them from the beach and tells them to cast their nets on the right side of the boat. When they follow Jesus' advice they catch a great net full of fish. The Pastor said if you're not fulfilled or satisfied with your job, then maybe you're not casting your net where Jesus is calling you to cast. That message hit me like a ton of bricks. I had been running in the opposite direction of God's call in my life. Through this pastor, who I had never met before, God was speaking directly to me. If that wasn't a divine appointment, I don't know what one is... They happen all the time. Over the next week, I challenge you to look back on your life, especially at those times when you had to make significant life decisions and ask yourself, "Can you see God working behind the scenes influencing and turning what seemed at the time to be a coincidence into the thing that changed the direction of your life?" If so, I'd love to hear about it. You can call me, email or text me your story... They are all fascinating! Each of us has a story of how God called us or opened a door that was previously shut and locked.

The story of Ruth's divine appointment in meeting Boaz fits into a greater story God had planned from the beginning to redeem the world from sin, death, and the devil. I call this the story of Ruth's Divine Appointment, but it was also a divine appointment for Boaz as well. God had been preparing him, his whole life for this very moment when he would have the wealth and the desire to be of service to his neighbor and to show his love for God by doing good for someone else. You see, sometimes we're more like Ruth, in need of a blessing and other times we're more like Boaz, in need of giving a blessing to someone. God, being a perfect matchmaker brings the two together and we can all see what happened from there... Like Special Agent Leroy Jethro Gibbs I don't believe in coincidences either...

May you ponder Ruth's story and be able to see all those times in your life where God set you at a certain place in order to go through a certain experience so that your faith might be kindled into a flame and your heart set afire for this God who loves you. May God's timing be the perfect timing for a divine appointment in your life. May you find the words and the courage to share your divine appointment story so others can see God's glory working in and through you for the sake of the Gospel and for the sake of God's Kingdom here on earth. Amen.