

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from the one who showed us what true kindness looks like, our Savior and Lord, Jesus Christ, amen.

I can't believe Rally Day is here already! It seems like just yesterday we were doing the Children's Christmas Program and now summer is already over and the kids go back to school this week. I think the fair was a huge success. It'll be just a few more weeks and our farmers will be back out in the fields. I pray for a good harvest.

Time sure has a way of slipping away from us... We're already in the third chapter of Ruth and it was a good harvest for Boaz and all the farmers of Israel. When we last saw Ruth, she was in the fields gleaning the leftover grains of barley under the watchful eye of her dead husband's relative Boaz. The famine that drove Naomi, her husband, Elimelek, and their two sons from Israel to Moab was over. The war that had raged during the time of Gideon has ended. Prosperity has once again returned to Judah and to God's people. Naomi, who had lost so much, her husband and her only two sons has begun to realize that despite all the tragedy she's had to face, her life might be starting to improve a little bit... Our story picks up today with Boaz, a distant relative of Naomi's dearly departed husband, having completed the harvest. He and his workers are separating the grain from the chaff on the threshing floor. This was all manual labor. They would throw the wheat or barley up in the air and the night wind would blow the chaff away while

the heavier grain would fall to the floor. The workers would then go onto the threshing floor and continue to separate the good from the bad grains and other field debris. It was hard work and they would work well into the night.

At some point Boaz fell asleep right there on the threshing floor. Things were looking up for Boaz and for the two women who had returned from the far country of Moab to try to eek out a life back in Naomi's hometown of Bethlehem. It seems like Boaz was attracted to Ruth, but he never expressed his interest in her because he was not Naomi's closest next of kin. That was the custom back then. If a woman's husband passed away, the closest next of kin would be obligated to take the widow into his family and care for her for the rest of her life. Now taking in the young, lovely, and hard working Ruth would not have posed any problem, but Ruth came with some additional responsibilities. She came with a built in mother-in-law... There would be no separating the two women who had both suffered and lost so much. Because of her loyalty to Naomi and her faithfulness to the God of Israel Ruth was blessed to find this benefactor, Boaz.

As I said the economy of Bethlehem and all of Israel was picking up and Naomi saw this as her change to be a matchmaker between Ruth and Boaz. It was her idea to send Ruth to Boaz that night after he had finished putting the grain up into the silos and had eaten the celebratory meal, and drunk his fill of wine. This wasn't some torrid fling, but the common custom for an eligible woman to ask for

her intended spouse to “cover” her. This was the ancient way of asking for Boaz to marry her... Boaz must have been extremely flattered. After all he was an older man and probably a widower himself. He had no children of his own to leave his land and wealth. Ruth was an upright woman. She was extremely loyal to Naomi and Boaz was smitten. So, although we don’t know for certain what happened between Boaz and Ruth on that night in question, what we do know is that Ruth was the first to raise the question of getting married. She asked Boaz to cover her with his cloak, a metaphor for getting hitched... Boaz was hesitant at first only because he wasn’t Naomi or Ruth’s closest next of kin. Levitical Law stated the next of kin must be the one to take care of their widowed or orphaned family member. So, Boaz did the right thing by deferring to whoever that next of kin was. Apparently, that man wasn’t willing or able to care of both Ruth and Naomi... So, Naomi’s matchmaking seemed to work out for everyone. I almost want to break out in that sone from Fiddler on the Roof... Matchmaker, matchmaker, make me a match. Catch me a catch... So, Boaz did the right and the kind thing. He took Ruth to be his wife and they all lived happily ever after...

I can’t think of a better story to illustrate what it means to be kind... Ruth’s kindness to Naomi means she will never be alone again. Ruth sacrificed her opportunity to return to her own family back in Moab in order to stick with Naomi even though it meant travelling to a foreign land where she didn’t know the

customs, the language, or religion. She was going to a place where she had no family and no friends. She had to rely on the kindness of total strangers to survive. Then take Boaz. He may have been smitten with Ruth from the very beginning, but he knew he wasn't the closest relative. Instead of using his wealth and high position of honor in the community to get what he wanted, he humbled himself and deferred to the relative with the closest ties to Naomi's former husband Elimelek. Only after getting the go ahead from this other relative did Boaz take Ruth and Naomi into his family. Talk about showing kindness! Boaz was under no obligation to take in both women, but he did... He was under no law to include Naomi in the marriage deal, but he did... His only motivation was his kindness.

What would our world look like today if we followed these examples of love and kindness today? How many of our politicians would ever consider showing a little humility like Boaz did? Most of us today would rather be wrong on every issue rather than admit the other side might have some valid points... When I watch the news on any channel, I see very little kindness. Our children have precious few examples to learn from out there in the world... The only place I know where the values of love and kindness are always front and center is the Bible... We all have the opportunity to learn from the story of Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz about how to treat one another with kindness, love, and respect.

I don't know if Ruth and Boaz lived happily ever after or not, but I do know that when we humble ourselves and treat others with love and kindness we can all live better lives that are blest by God. The Bible is full of stories and verses to help us learn to be more kind to one another. We don't have to take in the widows and orphans off the streets, but we can start at home, treating the family we do have with kind words and humility. Instead of insisting on having our own way, what would it look like if we consistently put others in our family first all the time? I know that would be hard to do. I try, but fail almost daily... That doesn't mean we stop trying. Love, kindness, humility, and forgiveness – these are the pillars of strong Christian values. This story of Ruth points us directly toward our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Jesus showed nothing but kindness as he walked this earth doing God's work. He healed the sick, fed the hungry, and even raise people from the dead. When push came to shove, Jesus humbled himself and took up his cross for you and for me. During that entire time he never pointed a finger of blame or uttered a bad word even toward the very ones who nailed him to that cross. On the night of his betrayal, knowing Judas was about to turn him over to the Romans, Jesus still gave Holy Communion, his very body and blood to the man who would betray him... That's completely undeserved love and undeserved kindness.

May the examples of Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz and our savior, Jesus help us learn how to treat one another and our neighbors. May we be known as that kind

and loving congregation over there in Pittsburg Ohio doing God's work of sharing
love and kindness in every corner of God's world. Amen.