Reflections

[10 - 16 November 2024](https://www.rootsontheweb.com/lectionary/2024/134-november-december-2024-bc/proper-27) [Giving beyond obligation](https://www.rootsontheweb.com/lectionary/2024/134-november-december-2024-bc/proper-27)

**Ruth 3:1-5; 4:13-17**

**Begin with an opening prayer**

Lord Jesus, you came for us, giving everything.
Open our eyes afresh to see you;
open our hearts to give;
open our souls to worship;
open our minds to be wise.
Take us and use us for your glory.
**Amen.**

**Read the passage**

*Consider different ways to read the text. For example, hearing it in more than one version of the Bible.*

 **3**One day Ruth’s mother-in-law Naomi said to her, “My daughter, I must find a home[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ruth%203&version=NIV#fen-NIV-7174a)] for you, where you will be well provided for. **2**Now Boaz, with whose women you have worked, is a relative of ours. Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. **3**Wash, put on perfume, and get dressed in your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don’t let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. **4**When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do.”

**5**“I will do whatever you say,” Ruth answered. **6**So she went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do.

**13**So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When he made love to her, the Lord enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. **14**The women said to Naomi: “Praise be to the Lord, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! **15**He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth.”

**16**Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him. **17**The women living there said, “Naomi has a son!” And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

**Explore and respond to the text**

*Start by reading the Bible notes below. You may want to read them more than once, or pause after each paragraph to reflect on what you have read.*

 **Bible notes**

This is a significant story in many ways, not least for its importance in the genealogies of David and Jesus. It is also a complex one, especially in the interaction between Ruth and Boaz. Commentators from different theological perspectives offer varied interpretations of their relationship. Boaz is presented as the kinsman of Naomi and Ruth. The word kinsman literally means ‘acquaintance’. As such, Boaz was not obligated to help (as Ruth had not been obligated to help Naomi). Verse four has a degree of ambiguity: the word we have translated as ‘feet’ is literally ‘the place of legs’ and can be a euphemism for sexual parts. What exactly happened has many theories, from Ruth enacting a ritual used by sacred prostitutes, to consensual sex, to an entirely innocent lying at Boaz’s feet (or legs). The phrase ‘when they came together’ (4:13) might suggest that the more innocent interpretation of their first encounter could be right. At the time, when a widow (Ruth in this instance) had a child with a subsequent husband (Boaz) the baby would be reckoned to be that of the deceased first husband. And they say relationships are complicated today! It does explain why the baby is said to be Naomi’s next-of-kin. And again, it’s interesting to note that not every relationship in the family tree of Jesus was straightforward. In the midst of all the twists and turns of the story, Ruth is presented as a model of obedience but also as one with the strength of mind to choose what she believed was the right way.

**Reflection**

*Spend a few moments thinking about what stands out for you from the Bible reading. This idea may help.*

A national job website gives tips for those job hunting and preparing for interviews. It says that a common question at interview is: ‘Give examples of a time when you went “above and beyond”’. There are then some suggested ways to tackle the answer. It explains that employers want to see your levels of commitment and find out what your work ethic is like. In an interview situation, this question is targeted at how you perform to show you in the best light. In both today’s readings the focus is on someone else. Boaz gave because he wanted to help Ruth and Naomi; the unnamed woman gave in response to her love for God.

**Questions for reflection**

*You may wish to use these questions and the picture to help you think about or discuss issues arising from this week’s Bible passage.*

**Questions**

* When has someone gone ‘above and beyond’ for you?
* Have you ever done more than what is expected for someone? How did they react?
* What loving action could you do for someone else this week?

**Prayer**

**Prayer**

Uplifting God,
we give you thanks for the joy of giving and receiving;
for those special people in our lives
who makes us feel rich and cherished;
for those who show us day by day the value of little things.
Most of all, we praise you for your overwhelming and wonderful gifts
of life and love and hope,
reflected in your Son Jesus Christ,
in whose name we pray.
**Amen.**