

The Blessing – at Monarto Sporting Complex 24/04/2022

In 2003 I went to the Perenjori (Western Australia) Header Muster. The local farmers lined up 56 combine harvesters and stripped 500 acres of wheat in 24 mins. They won a Guinness World Record.

All the headers lined up – they kept to their colours:

- Green (John Deer)
- Yellow (New Holland)
- The other Yellow (Caterpillar)
- Green and White (Claas)
- Red (Case)
- The other Red (Massey Ferguson)
- **Silver (Gleaner)**

I want us to go back to the Ruth reading – Ruth was a harvester, a gleaner. Ruth was an outsider – a Moabite.

Let's go back to Sunday school – the interesting bits.

You would remember these 2 "men" who came to visit Lot who lived in the twin cities Sodom and Gomorrah. Now we know these 2 "men" are some kind of angels - the people in Sodom and Gomorrah didn't know this. It says: *the men of Sodom, both young and old, all the people to the last man, surrounded the house. And demanded Lot let them have sex with the 2 visiting men. Every single bloke – it says.* They demand Lot to send the 2 visitors out.

What to do? What would you do?

Lot thinks on his feet.

"Behold, I have two daughters who are virgins. Let me bring them out to you, and you can do to them whatever you please. But leave these men alone". Oh, to be one of lot's daughters.

It goes on. Lot leaves Sodom and Gomorrah and ends up in the mountains with his 2 daughters. They believe there're no men left on earth, so they get their father drunk and sleep with him - not a once off - at least 4 times. (Like I said this was the interesting bit of Sunday school.) Lot's daughters have baby boys – one is called Moab. Ruth comes from Moab – she is a Moabite – she's an outsider – she's a widow.

Despite, having the wrong name, being the wrong colour, having a dodgy family tree – she's a believer in the one true God of Israel. She's got to know the God of grace through her mother-in-law Naomi. (Some mother-in-law's are good.)

Ruth's husband died in the great famine – so mother-in-law Naomi encourages Ruth to go back to her country Moab and find another husband. "No way"! Ruth says. I want to be with you and the one true God. Ruth the Moabite, the outsider, the dodgy one, says the most beautiful words in the whole of the Old Testament to her mother-in-law: *Where you go I will go, and where you live I will live; your people shall be my people, and your God my God"* Ruth has really got to know the God of grace. And she really wants to know the people of God

She goes to Bethlehem with Naomi ready to start a new life as a widow – a stranger among God’s people. She rocks up with nothing – she has one legal option available to her – Gleaning. Gleaning was the legal right for the widows, the poor, and homeless to go into the paddocks after harvest and pick up any grain left over – it was theirs to be had, legally. Here’s the law in Leviticus 23:22 *“When you reap your harvest, you shall not reap your field right up to its edge, nor shall you gather the gleanings after your harvest. You shall leave the gleanings for the widows, the poor, and for the homeless: I am the Lord your God.”*

God wrote that law down for his people. Why did God have to make it law?
 Why did God have to make compassion a legal requirement?
 Could it be that if he didn’t the widows, the poor, the homeless would starve to death?
 Could it be that the people of God would exploit the poor?

Gleaning was Ruth’s legal life-line – and into the harvested paddocks she goes. While it’s all legal – we read in the story of Ruth that these women, alone in the paddocks, were still subject to abuse, even rape it says. Ruth an outsider, with a dodgy name, catches the eye of Boaz and he protects her. He even tells his men to “accidentally on purpose” leave a bit of extra grain lying around.

To cut a fairly short story even shorter, Boaz marries Ruth. They have a son called Obed. Obed has a son called Jesse. Jesse has a son called David – God made a promise to David that from this line a Saviour will be born. Ruth was saved by God’s law – God’s imperative. We live under that same law today – “a new commandment I give unto that you love one another as I have loved you; by this people will know you are my disciples – by this they’ll know you are Christians.

Ruth was saved by God’s law – let her glean – let her take the crumbs – let her take whatever she needs to survive – and protect her while she does it.

We will officially bless this season soon. We are asking God to bless us so that we can be a blessing to others. If there’s nothing for the outsider to glean from us – we don’t deserve the blessing. I have been here 3 months (less Covid) in that short time I have seen the outsiders looking for something to glean, to survive, mostly they have been just looking for a scrap of love – they have been told in many and various ways to go away.

It’s been 20 years since I was a vicar in this Murray Valley Lutheran Community and our numbers are decimated.

Has there been anything for people to glean – freely, over the years?

Have we made sure that there is something for desperate people?

Have we been like Boaz – have we “accidentally on purpose” made sure there is something for those in need to glean.

Have we welcomed the gleaners – those looking for a scrap of love to survive?

Have we encouraged them to come see that the Lord is good.

Ruth looked at her Mother-in-law and said I want what she’s got. I want to know the one true God of Israel. It is our imperative – “A new commandment I give unto you to love”

Are we asking God to bless us today so that we can be a blessing?

If not I don’t want it.

When Ruth Smith walks into our lives we have 2 imperatives – (1) to love her and (2) to let her glean whatever she needs to survive and to know Jesus.

We have an imperative to bless Ruth.

Why does God have to make compassion and imperative?

Just back to these headers. The Gleaner – the silver one - made in Kansas USA.

I don't like it. Silver – you don't have silver headers.

The Gleaner is a good header – it's so good it is renowned for not leaving any grain behind – that's why they call it the gleaner – it picks up every grain and leaves nothing for others.

The Silver Gleaner is greedy – I don't like it.

Amen.

Lord of the harvest bless us with a heart to be your love to outsiders. Help us share your love, help us be you generous people who don't need a law to be compassionate.

But father keep that law of compassion there for when we forget – for when we don't like the Ruth's that come across our lives.

Let us not become like the silver combine called the gleaner who sucks up every speck of grain for ourselves leaving nothing for others.

Lord bless us so that we become your blessing in this community.

In Jesus name Amen.