

Generosity Abounds
Ruth 1-4
First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
October 26, 2025
Rev. Jill Cameron Michel

If you haven't read the book of Ruth, I would encourage you to do so. As Paul said, it is a little book with only four chapters. Yet, those chapters are packed full of gracious characters, stories of hardship and stories of delight, stories of commitment and community and what it means to be human. And, as you began to hear in our retelling of it, it contains a story that is full of generosity.

So, what does it mean for us to live generously?

What does that look like?

We most often talk about it financially, and that *is* one form of generosity, and one that *matters* in a world where money is an important resource.

So, generosity is about money. *And* it is so much more than that.

This little book of Ruth, one of only two in the Bible that bears the name of a woman, reminds us of the fullness of generosity.

So, let's explore this together.

The story begins with a family, a mother, a father, and two sons. In a time of hardship, they went to live as refugees in another land. While they were there, major life events took place. First, Elimelech, the husband, died. Then, the sons, who were of a marrying age, each married a woman from the country which had taken them in. But tragedy struck again. And soon, Naomi, the mother, was not only a widow but had also outlived her children.

When she got word that the famine in her homeland was over, Naomi knew there was nothing about staying in Moab that still made sense. So, she prepared to return knowing that she had a long and lonely journey ahead of her.

If you read Ruth, what you will hear is a tender conversation between Naomi and the two women, Orpah and Ruth, who were more than daughters-in-law, they had become daughters to her.

Naomi, even in the midst of her deep grief, wanted what was best for Orpah and Ruth. And within the constructs of their culture, what made the most sense for these two young women, who still had life ahead of them, was for them to return to the households of their parents and to look for a fresh start.

In the telling of this conversation what we hear is that even with Orpah, who *does* return to her family of origin, separating from Naomi is difficult. These women from different cultures and different backgrounds, who had experienced tragedy, found a home with each other.

Now for Ruth that means she cannot, she will not leave Naomi. Rather, she leaves *her* home and *her* people, and she chooses to take Ruth's for her own. She chooses to sacrifice and to risk, not only the travel, not only the risk of wondering how and if she'll be welcomed, but also to risk her future which may or may not end up including a spouse and children, things that were central to a woman's identity in that culture. But for Ruth, Naomi and the relationship they share is worth that risk.

In fact, those familiar lines, which we often use in weddings, actually come from this story, from the conversation between Naomi and Ruth, where Ruth says, "Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die - there I will be buried" (Ruth 1:16-17, NRSV).

And with that, Ruth returned to Bethlehem with Naomi.

Once back in Naomi's homeland, her grief and bitterness became even more apparent. Naomi was mourning. Yet still she did not completely turn in on herself. Rather she was able to look beyond her pain and to choreograph things in the background in a way that would mean life and love for Ruth.

Because, into the picture has come a compassionate man named Boaz. Boaz entered the story when Ruth, as allowed by law and custom, went to glean in nearby fields. She happened to end up in a field of Boaz, a relative of Naomi's husband. And as soon as Boaz noticed her, he began to offer kindness and protection beyond what was required. He knew the risks that faced her as a young woman from another land gleaning for her household. And so he invited her to stay to glean on his land, guaranteeing her protection and also having his workers leave more behind for her in order to provide not just enough to survive, but a gift of abundance.

Again, I encourage you to read the book of Ruth, to read this whole story. But if you haven't yet, here's a spoiler alert. Where the story ends is with Boaz and Ruth marrying...with a child being born to them...and with that child being shared in a way that Naomi, too, gets to claim him as her own.

Throughout this story we see the ways that we, as human beings and as communities, are designed for generosity. Ways that too often we seem to forget.

But did you notice them here?

Women, who didn't have to choose each other, made each other a priority and committed their lives to each other's care.

Two cultures who could have treated the foreigner with disdain, but who didn't. Moab, who could have detained and deported Naomi, Elimelech, and their sons when they first arrived, instead welcomed them in. Israel, where the laws of the land ensured that all among them from the poor to the widows to the foreigners had enough to eat and a semblance of security.

Boaz, who even within the laws of his people, could have only offered the minimum to Ruth. He didn't have any reason why he had to share more generously. He could have chosen not to protect her, not to offer additional amounts of food to her, not to treat her with respect and regard, not to work with honesty and transparency within the system that determined her future. He could have even staked a claim on her and married her without doing any of these things.

And yet, throughout this story we see generosity woven.

There is a generosity of spirit as people see each other as people, see each other's humanity and find ways to bridge what divides them.

There is a generosity within the systems, systems that understand that we are each our neighbor's keeper and that we all do better when any of us does better.

There is a generosity of resources as food and property are offered in ways that support the vulnerable.

The book of Ruth teaches us many things. But one of its central reminders is that the more generous we are with one another - with our approaches to and our assumptions about strangers, with understanding and grace offered between humans - the more generous we are with one another, the more generous we are with other parts of our lives. When we live with open and generous hearts, when we live with a willingness to see the humanity of our neighbor, then we also live with deeper trust and a greater sense of responsibility for the people and world around us.

What would it look like if we approached each person - stranger and neighbor - with curiosity and compassion?

How would letting our hearts be open to greater generosity impact the way we relate to others and the way we live in this world?

In what ways would our need to protect resources - things like time and money - change if we lived with a generous spirit?

When generosity abounds within us and around us, we live differently and the world thrives because of it. May it be so.