



Sermon Transcript

June 27, 2021

An Extraordinary God! An Ordinary People!

Embrace the Ordinary

Ruth 4:1-22

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on June 27, 2021 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio and video version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at www.wethefc.com

Sermon Text

Ruth 4:1-22

4 Now Boaz had gone up to the gate and sat down there. And behold, the redeemer, of whom Boaz had spoken, came by. So Boaz said, Turn aside, friend; sit down here. And he turned aside and sat down. 2 And he took ten men of the elders of the city and said, Sit down here. So they sat down. 3 Then he said to the redeemer, Naomi, who has come back from the country of Moab, is selling the parcel of land that belonged to our relative Elimelech. 4 So I thought I would tell you of it and say, Buy it in the presence of those sitting here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, redeem it. But if you will not, tell me, that I may know, for there is no one besides you to redeem it, and I come after you. And he said, I will redeem it. 5 Then Boaz said, The day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the widow of the dead, in order to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance. 6 Then the redeemer said, I cannot redeem it for myself, lest I impair my own inheritance. Take my right of redemption yourself, for I cannot redeem it.

7 Now this was the custom in former times in Israel concerning redeeming and exchanging: to confirm a transaction, the one drew off his sandal and gave it to the other, and this was the manner of attesting in Israel. 8 So when the redeemer said to Boaz, Buy it for yourself, he drew off his sandal. 9 Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, You are witnesses this day that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and to Mahlon. 10 Also Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Mahlon, I have bought to be my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brothers and from the gate of his native place. You are witnesses this day. 11 Then all the people who were at the gate and the elders said, We are witnesses. May the Lord make the woman, who is coming into your house, like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you act worthily in Ephrathah and be renowned in Bethlehem, 12 and may your house be like the house of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah, because of the offspring that the Lord will give you by this young woman.

13 So Boaz took Ruth, and she became his wife. And he went in to her, and the Lord gave her conception, and she bore a son. 14 Then the women said to Naomi, Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! 15 He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has

given birth to him. **16** Then Naomi took the child and laid him on her lap and became his nurse. **17** And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, A son has been born to Naomi. They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

18 Now these are the generations of Perez: Perez fathered Hezron, **19** Hezron fathered Ram, Ram fathered Amminadab, **20** Amminadab fathered Nahshon, Nahshon fathered Salmon, **21** Salmon fathered Boaz, Boaz fathered Obed, **22** Obed fathered Jesse, and Jesse fathered David.

Introduction

There is something significant about the “ordinary.” I know “ordinary” doesn’t sound all that exciting or thrilling, or possibly even hopeful. But don’t underestimate what God does with the rather ordinary. This is good news because we are all rather “ordinary” when it comes down to it.

I like how Tish Harrison Warren captures this common truth about us all in her book *The Liturgy of the Ordinary*. She asks us to think about the rather ordinary way we all wake up in the morning from a night’s sleep. She writes, “Whether we’re children or heads of state, we sit in our pajamas for a moment, yawning, with messy hair and bad breath, unproductive, groping toward the day. Soon we’ll get buttoned up into our identities: mothers, business people, students, friends, citizens. We’ll spend our day conservative or liberal, rich or poor, earnest or cynical, fun-loving or serious. But as we first emerge from sleep, we are nothing but human, unimpressive, vulnerable, newly born into the day, blinking as our pupils adjust to light and our brains emerge into consciousness.”¹ In other words, the way we all wake up in the morning points to the fact that we are all rather “ordinary.”

I often point out this truth when I do premarital counseling. As the couple is anticipating their “extraordinary” wedding day, something worthy of celebration, I try to prepare them for the rather “ordinary” life that is ahead of them. I remind them that most of their marriage will not be lived in the wedding day mode, but it will be lived in the “ordinary” and mundane tasks of life. I like how Kevin DeYoung puts it. He says that the newly engaged couple thinks that it is the romance that preserves the marriage. But if you ask the couple celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary, they will say “it’s the institution of marriage that will preserve the romance.”² It is the institution of marriage that champions the ordinary everyday call “to have and to hold from this day

forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, until we are parted by death.” Those vows are loaded with the ordinary things of life: the good, the bad, to be with plenty or in want, sick or healthy . . . and even death. It is all rather “ordinary.”

Scripture champions the “ordinary.” It goes against the grain of our culture to champion the “ordinary.” We are more prone to move rather quickly to the “extraordinary.” We often long for the next new thing and we celebrate and idolize the one who does the extraordinary. In one sense, it is natural to delight in the person who is able to accomplish what my rather ordinary talents can’t. We enjoy the singer who can sing in a way we can’t. We enjoy the talents that entertain us or the gifts that make our lives easier. But these talents and gifts tend to be the exception—hence they are “extraordinary.” But often Scripture celebrates the ordinary. We are told that our labor for the Lord is not in vain. Why would we need this kind of encouragement? Because often it seems that my contribution to the work of God is . . . well . . . rather ordinary and doesn’t amount to much. Or consider how Paul encourages us in 1 Thessalonians 4:11 to “*aspire to live quietly, and to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands.*” When is the last time you have been encouraged to “aspire” to the ordinary?

This morning we come to the end of our time in Ruth. This sermon series was called “An Extraordinary God! An Ordinary People!” Even though we find the story of Boaz and Ruth in the Bible, they are portrayed as ordinary people. It is one of the big lessons of the book of Ruth. D. A. Carson summarize this takeaway from the book of Ruth. He says, “At one level, this is a simple story of God’s faithfulness in the little things of life . . . God still has his people—working hard, acting honorably, marrying, bearing children, looking after the elderly.”³ As we will see this morning, it is through these ordinary lives—lives no different than our ordinary lives—that God does something extraordinary.

In Ruth 1 we saw an “ordinary people and an extraordinary love.” Ruth committed herself to Naomi when Naomi was down, when Naomi’s leaves had fallen and she was returning home empty. In Ruth 2 we saw “ordinary people and an extraordinary character” as Boaz was introduced to us as “*a worthy man*” and his loving kindness to Ruth was a testament to his character. In Ruth 3 we saw “ordinary people and an extraordinary community” as each one put the interests of others ahead of their own interest. When that happens it brings peace, protection and provision. We bring this wonderful story to a conclusion today and we will see “an ordinary people and

extraordinary results.” Be encouraged. God is at work in the ordinary.

God is in the Ordinary

One of the interesting features about the book of Ruth is that God is not prominently featured in the book. God is only mentioned two times in the book, once in the beginning and once in the end. He is mentioned in Ruth 1:6 and Ruth 4:13. Now this is not to suggest that God is not present, God is most definitely present. But in the book of Ruth, God is portrayed as working behind the scenes to accomplish his purposes.

We saw God working behind the scenes when we were in Ruth 2. Ruth needed to collect food for her and Naomi so she went to a field to gather what the reapers left behind. The text says that “*she happened to come to the part of the field belonging to Boaz.*” When we were looking at this part of the story, we noted that the author is giving a knowing wink of the eye at the reader as if to say, “it just so happens” that Ruth landed in the field belonging to Boaz. And then it says that while Ruth was there, “*behold, Boaz came from Bethlehem.*” Again, the message being conveyed is not that these things happened by chance or the stroke of good luck. No! God was at work in the ordinary details.

This happens again in Ruth 4. Last week we saw Ruth make her way during the night down to the threshing floor where Boaz was sleeping and she called on Boaz to perform his role as Naomi’s kinsman redeemer. She was proposing marriage to him. However, there was a male relative who was closer to the family than Boaz and the role of the redeemer first falls on the nearest relative. Boaz is definitely interested in meeting Ruth’s request, but he first needs to settle things with the nearest redeemer and Ruth 3 ends with the assurance that Boaz would settle the matter immediately . . . the very next morning. And so Ruth 4 begins with Boaz going down to the city gate, the place where business is often conducted. And it says in Ruth 4:1, “*And behold, the redeemer, of whom Boaz had spoken, came by.*” This is another wink by the narrator. It is meant to convey surprise. Edward Campbell said the Hebrew construction of this verse “conveys a hint of God’s working behind the scene.”⁴ It “just so happens” that the nearest relative in question makes his way down to the city gate where Boaz happens to be.

It is easy to lose sight of God when you are caught up with the ordinary things of life. In fact, God can often seem absent in the ordinary activity of life. God can seem distant. Or even, God can seem rather ordinary, himself. Nothing exciting is happening in your life and in there is nothing miraculous to point to in your faith. At times, our faith can all seem rather insignificant and irrelevant . . . rather ordinary. You might be tempted to

give up on it all. Kevin DeYoung describes it this way. “We haven’t learned to be ordinary. Our jobs are often mundane. Our devotional times often seem like a waste. Church services are often forgettable. That’s life. We drive to the same places, go through the same routines with the kids, buy the same groceries at the store, and share a bed with the same person every night. Church is often the same too—same doctrines, same basic order of worship, same preacher, same people. But in all the smallness and sameness, God works—like the smallest seed in the garden growing to unbelievable heights.”⁵ Most often, following Jesus is pretty ordinary. Eugene Peterson made famous this description of the Christian life—“a long obedience in the same direction.” That sounds so . . . ordinary. And so Ruth reminds us that even when God feels like he is somewhere off centerstage and behind the curtain somewhere, he is at work in these ordinary things of life. Or as Paul encourages us in 1 Corinthians 15:58. *“Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”* God is in the ordinary.

Loving-kindness: The Stuff of the Ordinary

All throughout this series on Ruth, we have been looking at the theme of loving-kindness. The Hebrew word is *hesed*. Last week we saw how Naomi was pouring herself out for the interest of Ruth. Then we saw how Ruth was putting the interests of Naomi ahead of her own interest. And then, of course Boaz, was acting on the interest of Ruth and Naomi. It was beautiful to see how each one was considering the other ahead of their own interest. That is loving-kindness. It is powerful. It is restorative. It is the stuff that makes the life of the ordinary so extraordinary.

What makes this chapter in Ruth so hard is trying to understand the ancient customs of the kinsman redeemer and the idea of marrying the widow of a close relative in order to bear a son and therefore perpetuate the name of the deceased relative. It is so foreign to our way of thinking, but it was part of the “ordinary” way of life in Israel. Even the commentaries struggle to fully explain the customs and practices of ancient Israel. I will try my best to capture what is happening here. But even though the customs may be difficult to fully understand, there is one thing that is very clear from the text. The nearest kinsman redeemer, who just so happens to show up at the gate when Boaz was there that morning, shows no concern for Ruth. Instead, he only looks out for himself. Boaz, on the other hand, at great personal cost to him, acts on behalf of the interest of others. What Boaz does is “loving-kindness: it is the stuff of the ordinary.”

First of all, do you notice that there is no name given to this nearest of kinsman

redeemers? He remains nameless in the text. Surely, Boaz knew his name. He didn't just know of him. He was a close relative. In our text it says that when Boaz saw him he said, "*Turn aside, friend, sit down here.*" That word *friend* could be better interpreted, *so and so*.⁶ "Sit down here, so and so." Some even refer to this guy as "no name." Not mentioning his name is meant to cast a negative light on this individual for not acting on behalf of the interest of Ruth. It gets to the heart of what the kinsman redeemer is called to do. We read in verses 5 and 10 that by buying the land that belonged to Naomi's deceased husband and by marrying Ruth, if she conceived a son, he would *perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance*. But Mr. So and So, Mr. No Name, was only interested in his own name—ironically a name that has long been lost from the pages of history. No one knows his name.

Mr. So and So sits down next to Boaz and Boaz informs him that their relative Naomi *is selling the parcel of land that belonged to our relative Elimelech*. Mr. So and So, was first in line to redeem it. But if he wasn't interested in doing so, Boaz was willing to redeem it. When we read that Naomi *is selling a parcel of land*, if this was happening in our time and in our culture, we would have a certain understanding of what was taking place. We would see a realtor's sign on a parcel of land and once it is bought by someone else, it no longer belongs to Naomi. That is not what is happening here. In fact, the issue at hand is not the outright selling of land.

When Israel inherited the land, each clan was given a portion of land and it could not be sold permanently to another. It was to stay in the clan. The issue at stake here is more about the right to use the land. Most likely, before Elimelech moved his family to Moab, due to the famine, he sold the rights to the use of his land to someone else. Since Naomi does not have the means to repurchase the field, she is turning to her nearest kinsman to do so. We know from the beginning of the story that Naomi is beyond the years of having a child. As long as she is without a male heir, that property would be part of the estate of the relative who purchased it. So from a business point of view, it may initially be a purchase that comes with some cost for this man, but if there is no heir in the pipeline he stands to profit and probably double the size of his inheritance. And so Mr. So and So jumps at the opportunity and he says, "*I will redeem it!*"

At this point, Boaz comes with what appears to be a surprise to Mr. So and So. Boaz informs him that if he goes to redeem the land, he would also need to take on Ruth as his wife with the hopes that she would bear a son. If she bears a son, then that inheritance would then return to Naomi and her family. He said, "*The day you buy the field from the hand of Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the widow of the*

dead, in order to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance.” All of a sudden, this business deal poses the risk of great cost without no return. And so he says, “I cannot redeem it for myself, unless I impair my own inheritance.” He then gives Boaz the right of redemption.

I admire the character of Boaz here. Clearly, you can tell from Ruth 3 that he has taken a liking to Ruth. Naomi noted at the end of Ruth 3 that Boaz wouldn’t rest until he settled this matter. He was a man on a mission. Consequently, there is this moment of tension in Ruth 4 where it is possible that the nearest relative would be willing to take Ruth as his wife. I can imagine that would have broken Boaz’s heart. And yet, his integrity is demonstrated by being willing to set aside his desires in order to do the right thing. When Mr. So and So pulls back from this responsibility, Boaz immediately steps in and does the right thing. *“Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, You are witnesses this day that I have bought from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and to Mahlon. Also Ruth the Moabite, the widow of Mahlon, I have bought to be my wife, to perpetuate the name of the dead in his inheritance, that the name of the dead may not be cut off from among his brothers and from the gate of his native place. You are witnesses this day.”*

Integrity. Self-sacrifice. Loving-kindness. This is the stuff of the ordinary life that has impact that is far reaching. It is the stuff that is found in the everyday living of life. This is why Paul calls us to live peaceful, quiet, godly and dignified lives. Kevin DeYoung was reflecting on the rock star Bono and some of the “extraordinary” ways he has been able to do good through his fame. But then he said this. “With all due respect, what’s harder: to be an idolized rock star who travels around the world touting good causes and chiding governments for their lack of foreign aid, or to be a line worker at GM with four kids and a mortgage, who tithes to his church, sings on the worship team every week, serves on the school board, and supports a Christian relief agency and a few missionaries from his disposable income?”⁷ In other words, it is the common and ordinary plodders that God most often uses to accomplish his purpose.

Results of the Ordinary: Extraordinary!

This is one of the main points of the book of Ruth. K. Lawson Younger says that the lesson of Ruth is that “when common people act unselfishly toward each other in accordance with God’s standard of loving-kindness, they achieve uncommon results.”⁸ In other words, from the ordinary, comes the extraordinary. What was the extraordinary that came from the story of Boaz and Ruth?

Boaz settled the matter quickly and he married Ruth. And we discover in verse 13, in rather rapid fashion that Ruth quickly conceived and gave birth to a son. The picture we have of Naomi at the beginning of the story of Ruth is completely reversed. She came back to Bethlehem *empty* but now, restored. The women who first greeted Naomi when she asked them to call her *Mara*—which means “bitter” are now saying to Naomi, “*Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without a redeemer, and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age, for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has given birth to him.*”

Carolyn Custis James says that she often wrestles with the end of the book of Ruth, or often by the way it is portrayed. It seems to end much like a Disney story, kind of like *Cinderella* where it all comes together in the end. Everything gets tied up into a nice neat bow. Ruth gets her husband. Boaz and Ruth have a baby. The fortunes of Naomi are reversed and she is provided for in her old age. But speaking on behalf of the stories of women she knows, that is not always how the story ends. She says that what we need to do here is remind ourselves that Boaz and Ruth are not the heroes of the story. Remember, they are ordinary people doing ordinary things. Rather, God is the hero of the story. And so she says, “Boaz and Ruth aren’t ‘starting a family’ in the typical way we think of today. They are rescuing a family.”⁹ With God as the hero working behind the scene, it is a rescue plan that is bigger than one can possibly imagine.

The book ends with a genealogy that quickly raises the significance of this story beyond the good fortune that unfolded for Naomi. The incidental details of this story had national ramifications for the nation of Israel. From this relationship between Boaz and Ruth comes David. “*And the women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, A son has been born to Naomi. They named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.*” Younger says about this, “It is at this point that the reader can perceive how precarious the situation was. Without Ruth the line of Elimelech would be extinguished, as too the line of Boaz, and hence no David.”¹⁰ No David!?!? Do you remember the movie *Back to the Future* when Marty Mcfly goes back in time and he needs to make sure that his dad and mom dance at the prom and fall in love. If not, then it will alter the future and he won’t exist. He has a picture of himself and his siblings and when it looks like the possibility of his dad and mom not dancing at the prom he and his siblings begin to fade from the picture—they would cease to exist. When you go back and read the story of Ruth, there are several places where the picture of David begins to fade. But then through the sovereign work of God and the ordinary actions of Boaz and Ruth, the line of Elimelech is restored and it leads us to the kingly line of David.

We know that the story doesn't end with the pages of Ruth. We have the benefit of knowing that the significance of the kingly line of David leads us to the Messiah, Jesus. It is interesting—and it is no accident—that the genealogy listed at the end of the book of Ruth has Boaz listed as the seventh name . . . the number of perfection. The *go'el*—the kinsman redeemer—Boaz, points us to the *go'el*—the Redeemer who lays down his life to rescue us and to form us into his family. All of what happened in the ordinary actions of *loving-kindness* in the book of Ruth actually ripples into your life and mine. Those ordinary actions have impacted you and me because they are part of the line that leads us to Jesus.

Don't underestimate the power of the ordinary. The church needs more plodders who live with the conviction that God is working behind the scenes through the ordinary lives of his people to impact generations with the rescue that comes to this world from Jesus. The church is not an incidental part of God's plan. But it can all seem rather ordinary. And in some sense, it is. But God uses the ordinary to do something extraordinary. He rescues people and he perpetuates his name through their testimony.

I hope when we get to heaven, we get to hear the ordinary stories of the generations that came before us and how God “just so happened” to be at work generations before we were ever born to rescue our lives in Christ. And then, I look forward to the stories that unfold generations after us in ways that we could never imagine. I look forward to seeing how God takes the ordinary testimonies of our church family that ripple down through the ages. I am confident that God is using us to that end because we are promised that our *labor is not in vain*. Embrace the ordinary way of the church! Kevin DeYoung adds, “If we truly love the church, we will bear with her in her failings, endure her struggles, believe her to be the beloved bride of Christ, and hope for her final glorification. The church is the hope of the world—not because she gets it all right, but because she is a body with Christ for her Head.”¹¹

Conclusion

Today, we have three people getting baptized. Their stories are illustrations of how God uses the ordinary lives of family and church to rescue us from our sin through Jesus. This is why baptisms are so encouraging to us. They are tangible evidence of how God is using the ordinary testimony of his people to do the extraordinary.

Tish Harrison Warren reminds us that when Jesus came to the waters of baptism, the voice from heaven said, “*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.*” She

noted that up to this point, Jesus hadn't really done anything. No miracles had yet been performed. He hadn't gone to the cross yet or rose from the dead. You would think this is something you would hear from the Father after he feeds the 5,000 or brings the dead back to life. But none of that had happened to this point. Instead, up to this point, the incarnate Son of God lived a rather ordinary life. She said, he was "a man who went to work, got sleepy, and lived a pedestrian life among average people."¹² God in the flesh—extraordinary—for sure. But in the flesh, nonetheless—ordinary. It reminds me that I don't have to do the "extraordinary" to be loved by God. I am loved by God before I do anything. In fact it is my confession that I can't do anything and that I need Jesus that enables me to know the love of God. It is this love that allows me to fully embrace the ordinary. God loves me. Jesus died for me. Out of that love, I can live a life of *loving kindness* and in a rather ordinary way, God does the extraordinary.

¹Tish Harrison Warren *Liturgy of the Ordinary* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2019) Kindle Reader 103

²Kevin DeYoung "The Glory of Plodding" www.ligonier.org May 1, 2010

³D. A. Carson *For the Love of God Vol. 1* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1998) August 10

⁴Edwqard Campbell *Ruth* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975) 141

⁵DeYoung

⁶K Lawson Younger *Judges/Ruth: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002) 474

⁷DeYoung

⁸Younger, 488

⁹Carolyn Custis James *The Gospel of Ruth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008) 199

¹⁰Younger, 484

¹¹DeYoung

¹²Warren, Kindle Reader 127

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COMMUNITY
GROUPS

Getting To Know Me Questions

1. What are some of the ordinary ways others have impacted your life?
2. What did you learn about “loving-kindness” through this series on Ruth?

Diving Into The Word

3. Read Ruth 4:1-22 - What stands out to you in this story?

How does Mr. So and So help us understand the risks to Boaz and how much he actually gains?

How are Boaz and Ruth guided in their actions by their relationship to God?

How are Boaz and Ruth role models for how men and women are supposed to serve God together?

How does the story of Ruth and Naomi cast a bigger vision for God’s calling on your life today—the call to join his rescue operation for the world?

How can you live more courageously for God?

How does it encourage you to know that God uses the ordinary to do the extraordinary?

Taking It Home

4. What is one thing you are taking from your study?