

There is a Redeemer

Ruth 3: 6-13

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When I was a youth pastor, I was in charge of the Christmas Eve family service. I'd get some of the young adults involved as we re-enacted the Christmas story in the huge sanctuary. So one year, there was beautiful Mary on the platform. Her blue robes had a mystical glow in the spotlight. The winged angel Gabriel was up in the balcony announcing that she would give birth to the savior. However, it didn't quite come out like the words in the Bible. The guy playing Gabriel was home from college. He had a great booming voice so I thought he would be perfect for the role. The spotlight came on him. "Behold Mary, you will consume a son." Down in the pews I was mentally coaching him, "No, no man, it's *conceive* a son, not *consume* a son." He seemed to know he had said the wrong word so he tried to correct himself. But it got worse. "You will consume a son. I mean, a son consume. Consume a son. A son consume." Poor Mary tried to gaze with a serene and holy face, but I could tell she was totally confused. A few seconds later, I saw Gabriel's mother take him gently by the shoulders and sit him down, in all his angel regalia, in a chair. I thought he'd been drinking. But actually, the poor guy had gone into insulin shock. Still, my play was a shambles. Mary, you will *consume* a son.

As I've thought about this nightmare scenario through the years, I've realized that sometimes mothers do consume their sons. They swallow them up in over-protection and too much sheltering. Or they swallow them up with specific ambitions and too much direction. More broadly, I've realized that consuming is something we humans do to each other. In lots of ways. We get used. We mistakenly think someone is truly interested in us for ourselves. Only to discover we've been exploited for their benefit. We consume images and videos on our screens, gobbling up someone else's youth and beauty and strength. Now we pay these YouTube artists, these Tik-Tokkers, and Insta-stars. The more people consume their images the more they make. That should be good, right? But I remember talking once to a social media influencer. She had followers in the tens of thousands. Made lots of money. But the pressure to create content was ever-present. She lived every moment thinking about how to turn those moments into blogs and promos. Her every waking hour was re-packaged as a consumable. Her life was click-bait.

One of the hardest parts of living in this world, especially when you're young, is getting drained, bled, slurped up, sucked dry and blatantly used by another until there is almost nothing left of us but a shell. This can harden our hearts, make our shells so thick no one can get in, keep us cynical and wary and fearful of others. And therefore starkly lonely for true connection. *Consume a son*. It happens a thousand ways, all the time.

And that reality exposes one of our greatest fears. *If I give my life to God, will he turn out to be just another consumer?* Another dominator? Another user? Will he take the offering of myself and flame it up like an animal sacrifice, leaving me burnt out and lifeless? It's this great fear of God that fuels everything from daily resistance to his claims to outright hatred of God. If I surrender me to you, Lord, will I lose *me*? Will I be denied who I am and what I want? I can't let that happen. So we forge on, exhausted, miserable, lonely, guilty, denying impending death and trying desperately to create happiness on our own terms. Turning away from God, we end up getting used by human consumers all the time.

This is the heart of our passage from Ruth today. She went all-in with the LORD I AM. She gave herself in complete trust to her mother-in-law Naomi and then to Boaz. She told Naomi, "All that you say, I will do." Following Naomi's advice, Ruth adorned herself and went to the threshing house, where Boaz winnowed his barley in the nighttime breezes. After he ate and drank, Boaz lay down to sleep near his grain. Ruth lay down at his feet, completely vulnerable. When Boaz awoke to find this beautiful woman, he could so easily have consumed her life and then discarded her. Who would believe the word of a foreign widow over that of a wealthy, respected landowner? Boldly, Ruth said to Boaz, "Spread your wings over your servant, for you are a redeemer."

Ruth asked Boaz to remember that Scripture commanded the nearest relative of a man who died to protect both his land and his heritage. He was to marry the widow, create offspring and thus carry on the deceased man's lineage. This was called redeeming. The kinsman bought back, or redeemed, the man's land and the man's family. Ruth appealed to Boaz. You are a redeemer. Take me as your wife. I will not reject your offer. I am willing to be yours. I put my life, my future, in your hands.

The risk was tremendous. There were ways around the law, especially since Ruth was childless and, even more, a foreigner. Boaz could have relegated Ruth to poverty and loneliness. He could prove to be another user, dominator, hurter. But he did not. All at once, Boaz maintained a protective, proper distance—he called

Ruth “daughter.” He also let his heart leap with the joy that this young woman would be willing to love and marry an older man like himself. He pledged himself to be her redeemer. He would commit his life in return to her.

So let’s cut right to the chase. What we celebrate at Christmas is that the eternal Son of God has pledged his life to us. He made the first move. He committed to being our redeemer. Jesus is the one, the only one, who can buy us back from exile, from loneliness, from failure, from guilt, from crushing grief, from brokenness and abuse, from rejection and hopelessness.

He has already established the grounds for redeeming us. He became our kinsman in the flesh. He shed his blood in an offering for our sin. He rose still joined to our humanity. He created reconciliation between God and man. He is the redeemer who has given his life for us.

Now everything depends on the question, “Will I give my life to Christ?” Perhaps for the first time. Perhaps after a long season of wandering and disobedience. Perhaps by giving a secret, cherished sin that I have long held back from him. Perhaps by trusting and releasing to him at a new level. There is a redeemer. Can I say as Ruth did, “All that you say, I will do?” Can I say, in this present moment, as Mary did to Gabriel, “Let it be to me according to your Word.”

Will Jesus prove to be another consumer? Another user? Another dominator? I tell you with all my heart. He is not those terrible things. He is a savior. A friend. A redeemer. But you won’t experience that until you give your life to him in trust. In faith.

Think of that as we listen to the story of a God who came to us born in a manger. Ask yourself, “Could I give my life to this God? Even now?”