

Take A Risk!
Ruth 3:1-18

Friends, if you've been watching movies or TV or you kept up with popular culture over the last 20 years then I'm willing to bet you've seen this picture before. *(show the famous Risky Business shot of Tom Cruise in boxers and socks)*

This is Tom Cruise, in his debut film "Risky Business" and this scene has become the signature clip of that movie.

Perhaps it needs a bit of explaining – Tom plays a wealthy teenager whose parents go away on a trip and leave him at home – alone!

So he's dancing and singing around the house in his socks and underwear.

Now this clip has become famous - it's been included in all sorts of video montages in theatre previews, it's been spoofed in other movies, and on late night talk shows.

And if you were to summarize the movie based on this clip alone you might think that Risky Business is just a movie about a teenager who's been left home and is feeling free and having some silly fun – an older version of Home Alone.

But... if you have seen the movie, or if you look up the synopsis on-line as I did – you'll discover this movie is really about "Risky Business" that's much more risqué than running around the house in your boxers...

which explains why my parents didn't let me see this when it first came out in the theatres.

Truth be told I was a bit shocked when I discovered what the finer details of the plot were... because I always thought this just another high-school party movie.

Now... we may experience hearing about chapter 3 in the story of Ruth in a similar fashion.

We may be vaguely familiar with the story and the characters, there are the poor widows, Ruth and Naomi and a kind man named Boaz.

We probably are familiar with that “famous scene” where Ruth refuses to leave her mother in law and utters those now famous words...

“Where you go I will go, your people will be my people, may the Lord deal ever so severely with me if anything but death separates me from you...”

But when we actually sit down and go through the story, maybe we’re a bit shocked when we come to chapter three...

We’re thinking– Whoa! That’s a bit more risqué than what I remembered! Isn’t the bible supposed to be G-rated? What’s up with this “risky business” that seems to be going on here?

And friends as we continue to explore the story of Ruth, this part of the story - more than any other - needs some background explanation.

That will help us understand what is going on within that cultural context, hear what God has to say to us about our own lives – and most importantly how this points us to Jesus Christ.

So let’s consider the setting first. Ruth and Naomi have come back to Bethlehem to start over. They’ve come back to the Promised Land, back to God’s people and they are looking for a better future.

They get off to a good start when Ruth goes out to scrounge up leftovers at the harvest, and she is able to gather what amounts to a good “handout” and this helps to tie them over, and give them some short-term relief.

But now, the harvest is coming to an end, winter is approaching – and the question of “long-term” sustainability comes into the picture.

And yes, it “just so happened” that Ruth has come into contact with their “guardian-redeemer” Boaz, who could buy back their land for them.

But up to this point he’s simply made sure that Ruth has received a good handout and fair treatment in the fields- there has been no initiative from his part to redeem their land yet.

And even if Boaz returned their land to them – there is still the question of who would work it?

Not Naomi, perhaps Ruth could - but all of it, all by herself?

Ruth might be able to plant a small garden so they could have a stable regular source of food... but what of their future?

Who would inherit the land once they were gone, who would make it prosper, who would carry on the family name or would it simply die out?

So, all of these concerns are on Naomi’s mind and she’s been wondering what to do about it.

And while Naomi may have come back empty and bitter, she apparently has not lost the motherly ability to “make plans”

So, now that we understand the context lets shift our focus and take a look at Naomi’s plan.

Brothers and sisters, this is more than just a mother-in-law trying to play cupid for her daughter-in-law, because Ruth or Boaz were too oblivious to realize or act on the chemistry that was going on between them.

No, Naomi is reaching back into her understanding of the Law of Moses and invoking a particular social clause which God had provided in an effort to secure a future for her daughter

in law, and herself and at the same time preserve her family line.

We find this particular clause in Deuteronomy 25:5-6, where God says...

“If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband’s brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her. The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel.”

Now since all the men in their immediate family are dead – this responsibility can be passed on to a relative – like Boaz, this is another function of being a guardian-redeemer.

Now Naomi knows that there is a short window of opportunity for this to happen while Boaz and Ruth are connecting during the harvest time.

And she sees this window of opportunity is drawing to a close as the harvest is coming to an end and for whatever reason Boaz has not taken any initiative in this matter...

So it is time to take matters into her own hands!

There is one last chance to try to make this happen, so Naomi instructs Ruth on the part she must play in “helping” Boaz to take some action and fulfill his role as the guardian-redeemer.

But... by enacting this plan, by taking these actions they are stepping outside of social convention and they are taking a risk!

So let’s look at this risky business, what’s really going on here – is it as risqué as we might think?

Well in one sense yes, and in another sense no – let me explain.

Yes it's risky that Ruth is putting on her best dress and some perfume and approaching Boaz at night while he's sleeping because this is not conventional.

Usually only certain kinds of women take any initiative around sleeping men after they have been eating and drinking and celebrating at harvest time.

And it's also risky because Naomi is having Ruth put herself at risk of being mistaken for an easy woman; someone might think she has come there looking for a good time and force himself on her. Her physical safety is at risk!

Or someone might see her hanging around to the threshing floor and recognize who she is... and they might think that Ruth has sunk to the point of prostitution in order to survive. So her reputation is being put at risk!

And while Boaz has certainly been charitable to her in the fields, she cannot be certain that he will respond positively to

her request – what if he outright rejects her and makes a scene! Ruth is at risk of being rejected and humiliated!

So yes, this whole plan is risky and that's partially because it could appear to be risqué, but in actual fact there is no risqué business that is going on – no secret romance or forbidden affair as much as some scholars would like to make it seem that way.

This is a sincere – albeit unconventional – request for marriage and the provision and security which comes with it.

Naomi and Ruth are willing to take the risk in going after this option in this way, because friends, this is their last chance for a better life and the benefits of success far outweigh the risks.

Now, last week we looked at how God is working quietly behind the scenes to bring hope into our lives, and we saw how hope “just sort of happens” in those unsuspecting ordinary moments.

But friends – today we see how we have the responsibility to grab on to that hope!

God has put an opportunity in front of Naomi and Ruth, and Naomi is not about to let this opportunity pass them by... without taking action!

And that's always a bit of a puzzle isn't it. Trying to determine when we need to wait for God to work behind the scenes, and when we should go and act upon an opportunity – it can be a bit of a risk.

But friends I will tell you this... if you have become aware through solid biblical teaching, or through sound pastoral advice, or from the Holy Spirit speaking to you - that God has brought “a hope” into your life - then you need to take action and grab a hold of it – even if it means taking a bit of a risk.

Now I don't know what sort of situations you might be going through in your life right now where you are waiting for Hope to appear and what that would mean for you to take a risk and

grab on to it – but brothers and sisters listen to what the Holy Spirit is teaching you this morning about taking the initiative and don't be afraid to take that risk!

And if you're not certain - I'm always available as your pastor to pray through it with you and get confirmation from the Holy Spirit on it.

And friends – whatever your personal situation is... this morning God also wants you to see that situation as a real life application in which He brings us to a deeper and more profound understanding of what it means to respond and grab on to **The Hope** which God has given us in Jesus Christ.

You see brothers and sisters – we are all like Ruth and Naomi in that we might have found some short term security in this life – maybe we have a good job, we're saved for our retirement, perhaps we're surrounded by friends and family who love us, or we're in good health, whatever... it's short term security – because it's only for **this** life. (if that...)

But friends the harvest time will eventually come to an end and after that what then? What about long term security, what about life after death?

Friends, we may *“know”* in our minds that Jesus Christ is related to us like Boaz to Naomi.

We may *“know”* that He has the capacity to redeem us and give us eternal life. But do we fully really realize in the depths of who we are how much we need Jesus to take us, to make us his and redeem us?

And perhaps you’re wondering, like I was, why Boaz hadn’t stepped up to the plate and come and claimed Ruth, why hadn’t he come to her and made the suggestion that he should be her guardian-redeemer?

Friends, I think we discover this when he says to Ruth *“you haven’t run after the younger men.”*

Up until this point in their relationship - Boaz wasn’t sure that Ruth wanted him to be her redeemer; a young woman might want a younger more attractive and perhaps more virile man than him.

Had Boaz simply acted up the circumstances he might have never known if she would have accepted his advances out of necessity, fear, and a sense of indebtedness or if it was truly out of love?

I think Boaz wanted to know that she truly wanted *him* to be the one to do the work of redeeming her and giving her a future and an heir.

And I think friends that Christ often works this way with us – not in the sense that “we overcome our sin and choose Jesus through our own ability...”

But in the sense that Jesus gives His Holy Spirit time to work on our hearts so that our hearts come around and truly desire and want Jesus as our Lord and Savior.

So in that sense Jesus is waiting for us to come to him, because to be honest friends the real Jesus is a bit “*old-school.*”

Brothers and sisters, the real Jesus isn’t as trendy as the latest “*new-age spirituality,*” he doesn’t fit in with the way people think about religion and God, and no matter how hard some might try – you can’t dress him up and try to make him more modern or post-modern or hipster.

You see Jesus wants to know that we’re not interested in running after these other options – we want him alone for who he really is.

He wants to know we’re not just allowing Him to be our redeemer because we feel indebted or because we’re just making sure our butts are covered; He wants to know we want Him.

Now as I said before we may know **about** him: we believe that he is our redeemer, we are grateful for the provision he gives

us, we’re glad that he treats us kindly and protects us – we **know** that He is our hope...

But have we come to the point where we realize that unless we take action and we grab onto that Hope while we have this window of opportunity, none of the redemptive benefits Jesus can provide for us will ever materialize in our life and especially in the life to come!

We will not have eternal security, peace, meaning, purpose, salvation and deliverance.

So friends my prayer is that this chapter in the story of Ruth has brought us to that point this morning.

That through this story we hear the Holy Spirit urging us... like Naomi to Ruth – go down to the Cross, kneel at the feet of Jesus, ask Him to be your Redeemer, tell Him you need Him – and He will tell you what to do next!

But this means we have to take a risk!

You will risk what other people will think of you if they see you there – kneeling and asking Christ to be your Lord and Savior.

You might risk your reputation – maybe people will call you a “fanatic” a “born-again” or “a Jesus freak” or maybe you’ve always thought people who found religion were “weak-minded people who needed a crutch.”

Or perhaps you’re not sure if Jesus will want to redeem you.

Maybe you think he’d want someone of better character, who is more talented and doesn’t have quite so many issues to work through.

Because behind your well maintained façade you’re full of bitterness, anger, fear, doubt or some other issue. You don’t want to risk rejection for all the baggage that you carry with you.

Friends, listen well and hear this good news. It doesn’t matter what you will risk or who you are... Jesus Christ is worth the risk and He will have you – take my word!

But you’ll have to come to him to get past those risks that you are worried about.

You’ll have to risk what others may think of you. And sometimes you may risk your physical safety to come to Christ, many people across this world face persecution if they confess Jesus as their Lord and Savior.

And let me tell you as one who has taken some of these risks and gone to Christ, that the benefits far outweigh the risks! They far outweigh the risks!

So friends this morning I have to ask you. Have you gone down to the cross?

Have you told Christ you need his forgiveness, that you need Him to change your heart so you can be redeemed and have an everlasting life?

Don't let the risk stop you. Come to Christ; let him know you want Him! Take that risk! Amen.