

I want to focus on the book of Ruth in light of Pentecost Sunday. Ruth is **not** part of the regularly scheduled readings, but I chose a selection of Chapter 1 to be the reading today because I thought it would be in interesting angle into Pentecost. Pentecost is Greek for fifty (50 days.) In Hebrew, it is known as Shavout, the festival of weeks. The number is related to the seven weeks counted after Passover: 7 x 7 weeks (I know 49 does not equal 50).

In contemporary Jewish practice, Ruth will be read as part of Shavout in worship. The modern Jewish festival begins this year on June 11, 2024. Whether it's a festival of the harvest or of the Holy Spirit, both Christian and Jewish traditions celebrate the One who provides. Pentecost is about a big tent that God draws all people into. Shavout is about us pitching a tent for each other. Both celebrate a harvest that only God can provide.

Book of Ruth The book of Ruth revolves around a Moabite woman who married the son of a Jewish couple (Naomi and Elimelek). Before things got very difficult, they were all living in Moab – not Judea. The book is set in the times of the Judges (when Israel was a loose confederation of tribes and before the Kings united the land).

During a Moabite famine, the husband Elimelek and his Jewish sons Mahlon and Kilion died, but Naomi and the Moabite daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, live. Orpah does the “smart” thing and stays in Moab to find another husband during the famine. However, young Ruth absolutely insists on accompanying Naomi the widow wherever she goes. The famine forces mother and daughter-in-law to migrate to Bethlehem. There they are left to grapple with their newly minted, impoverished refugee status. Now in Jewish territory the two women, Jew and Gentile, live like beggars picking at the edges of a relative's barley field just to survive

There is part of Ruth that is often read at Christian weddings: “I will go where you go, and your people will be my people.” This text is lifted from Ruth's insistent speech to stick with Naomi to help her return to her homeland.

Ruth goes to the edge of a field owned by a man named Boaz. Naomi is quick to see the signs. So, Naomi nudges her daughter-in-law to be a little more “forward” with Boaz. On the night of an important harvest, Ruth literally uncovers Boaz's feet while he sleeps, she lies on his feet, and waits for him to wake up.

Boaz is much older than Ruth and he is glad that she does not pursue younger men. He is interested, but there is some confusion about kinship relations and how Boaz should be ‘proper’ with Ruth. After propriety is settled, Ruth and Boaz get married. Ruth and Boaz give birth to Obed who would become the grandfather of King David.

I share all this context because it makes Pentecost personal. When the Holy Spirit showed up to the disciples in Acts, it was this huge event where the nations became one. Ruth is about an extended family becoming one. Same Spirit.