

*The God of Surprises*  
a meditation based on  
Ruth 4

The story of Ruth is a story about women. *“We are witnesses. May the LORD make the woman who is coming into your home like Rachel and Leah, who together built up the house of Israel. May you have standing in Ephrathah and be famous in Bethlehem. Through the offspring the LORD gives you by this young woman, may your family be like that of Perez, whom Tamar bore to Judah”* (Ruth 4:11-12). In this blessing given by “the chorus” of public witnesses, three women are named. Take note of the **order** the names are mentioned. First Rachel; then Leah. The order is significant.

Remember the story. Leah was the oldest, and Jacob her husband did not love her. Other people may not have noticed this, but the LORD did notice. *When the LORD saw that Leah was not loved, he opened her womb, but Rachel was barren* (Gen 29:31). Leah's womb was opened by God himself; along came *Reuben*, the first born. Then came *Simeon*, second. Then *Levi*, and after a while *Judah*. Leah was not loved by her husband, but she was having lots of babies! When Rachel saw this, she became very jealous of her sister. *“Give me children, or I'll die!” Jacob became angry with her and said, “Am I in the place of God, who has kept you from having children?”* (Gen 30:1-2).

Rachel, first mentioned, was barren. Ruth also was barren. Remember that she'd been married to Machlon for ten years; yet, no children! She was barren. When she marries Boaz, what do we read? *So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. Then he went to her, and the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son* (Ruth 4:13). Notice that: the LORD enabled her.

Why is Tamar mentioned by the witnesses? She had married Judah's son whose name was *Er* (E R), and when they were still young Er died. And just like with Ruth and Naomi the issue was, how will this woman – named *Tamar* -- be provided for (Gen 38)? Who will make sure she doesn't starve, doesn't go hungry? The question that keeps coming up in the story of Ruth is who will provide? Who will protect? Who will make sure that the weakest will be taken care of? This is not about who **deserves** to be provided for. It's not about who **earns** the right to be taken care of. A lot of times no one does; yet God has a system in place that ensures it will happen.

God's system is about surprises. We've looked at how surprising it was that a famine of all things came to Bethlehem, the house of bread. There's more surprises still about Bethlehem. It's just a little place. It is the least likely of places we would expect anything great to happen in. There were no palaces there; there was nothing “super” about it. It was plain. It was simple. It was small. And this is just the sort of

material God loves to work with. Micah, a prophet, predicted how it all would come out. *“But you, Bethlehem, Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times”* (Mic 5:2).

That one born in Bethlehem, his name is Jesus. What was the message Jesus brought? Again and again he spoke of the least, the little, the lost. Robert Farrar Capon observes, “Jesus came to save a lost and losing world by his own lostness and defeat; but in this wide world of losers, everyone except Jesus remains firmly, if hopelessly, committed to salvation by winning” (Robert Farrar Capon, “Losing as Winning”). It was exactly when Jesus appeared most defeated, that he actually won the greatest victory ever procured: the defeat of sin, death, and the devil. Not bad for one born in a small city.