Showing kindness **by Rev John Castle**

A sermon given on Sunday 11th October 2026
at St John the Baptist Church, Aldenham
(All-Age Harvest Celebration)

Reading(s): Ruth chapter 2 (abridged)

Introduction

Who likes food? What is your favourite food?

Today in our Harvest Celebration we are thanking God for all the good food we enjoy, and for all the hard work of the farmers who grew it for us. And one way of saying thank you to God is to bring food along to church, which will be taken to the Foodbank, where people can go to get food if they don't have enough money to buy what the need for themselves and their families. Sometimes people go through hard times, and they need someone to show kindness to them.

The story of Ruth and Naomi

We're going to hear a story from the Bible which is about some people who had a hard time, but received kindness. And as we listen to the story, I'd like you to notice who had a hard time, and who showed kindness.

But before that, I wonder if anyone can tell me the name of a famous person who was born in Bethlehem?

Yes, Jesus. Well, this story takes place in Bethlehem, more than a thousand years before Jesus was born. It's about two women called Naomi and Ruth – and a rich farmer called Boaz, who we'll meet later on. Naomi was married to Elimelech, and they had two sons, Mahlon and Kilion.

One year there was a terrible harvest, and there was hardly any food. So Elimelech, Naomi and their two sons travelled to the land of Moab and stayed there.

The boys grew up and married Moabite girls called Ruth and Orpah. But, very sadly, Elimelech and his two sons Mahlon and Kilion all died.

Naomi felt sad and bitter about what had happened, and decided to go back to Bethlehem. Her daughter-in-law Ruth loved Naomi and wanted to go with her. So the two women went back to Bethlehem. But they were now poor, with no one to look after them.

It was harvest time, and there was a law that said that when farmers harvested their grain, they should leave some behind for poor people to pick up. So Ruth decided to go into the fields where people were harvesting to gather some grain for herself and Naomi.

The story didn't end there. Ruth asked Boaz to marry her (yes, she did!), and they got married and had a little boy called Obed. After all the troubles that Naomi and her family experienced, there was a happy ending. And Obed later became the grandfather of King David – and an ancestor of Jesus, who was born in the same town, Bethlehem, a thousand years later.

Thinking about the story

Who had a hard time, and who showed them kindness?

Naomi lost her husband Elimelech and her two sons, Mahlon and Kilion. *Ruth* showed kindness to her by going with her back to Bethlehem and supporting her.

Ruth herself lost her husband Mahlon. She left her family and her country behind and went with Naomi to a country and a people she didn't know. She was a foreigner in the land of Israel, and had to learn how people lived there. Boaz says to her:

> "I have heard about everything that you have done for your mother-in-law since your husband died. I know how you left your father and mother and your own country and how you came to live among a people you had never known before."[1]

Ruth and Naomi had no money, and no one to look after them. But *Boaz* not only let Ruth collect grain in his fields, but also made sure she had plenty of food to take home with her. He invited her to share a meal with him and his workers, and made sure she was safe while she was working. And later on, he married Ruth, and treated Naomi as part of his family too.

There's also another character in the story, who isn't mentioned much, but Naomi says this person has also showed kindness. It is *God*. When Naomi hears that Ruth has been working in a field belonging to Boaz, she says:

> "The Lord always keeps his promises to the living and the dead."[2]

Naomi sees that God has guided Ruth to the field belonging to Boaz. She goes on to explain that Boaz is a relative of her husband Elimelech, and so he has a duty to look after the family of Elimelech. Ruth didn't know this when she went to the field, but God has guided her so that she meets Boaz, who shows kindness to her and later becomes her husband. And

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[1] Ruth 2:11 Good News Bible
[2] Ruth 2:20 GNB

through all of this Naomi's needs are met, and she ends up becoming a proud grandma.

So this story is all about kindness: the kindness Ruth showed to her mother-in-law Naomi; the kindness Boaz showed to Ruth and Naomi; and God's kindness, in working through Ruth to help Naomi, and through Boaz to meet the needs of both Ruth and Naomi.

What can we learn from this story?

Even when life seems hard, God is still there and he will help us through. God works through people, and he can work through us too. So when we give food to the Foodbank, God is working through our kindness to help the people who need the food.

What other ways are there to show kindness to other people? Here are some ways:

- Saying kind words
- Giving a hug or physical gesture
- Spending time with someone
- Thoughtful actions
- Sharing what you have with others

This story was originally written in Hebrew, and I thought I'd show you which word is used for kindness in the Old Testament. It's *ḥesed*. It's the kindness or love which God shows us, and which he wants us to show to other people.

How will you show kindness today?