

**This week's readings:** Ruth 3:10—Esther 1:12

*Reflection by the Rev. Elizabeth Felicetti*

Bible study motivated me into ordained ministry, fueling my call decades ago and recharging my battery now when the day-to-day load of ministry drains me. But I'm also passionate about writing, and a few years ago, as a sabbatical, I earned a master of fine arts degree in writing, building on my undergraduate degree in the same field. Poems, I learned when studying writing, have "turns." While many poems lack the plot of prose, poems do end up in a different place than they begin and turns help the poem to get there. A turn, as the word indicates, takes a poem in a different direction, or takes one idea further—a transition or change, or *volta* (an Italian word—writers like jargon as much as Episcopalians). I prefer turn.

I see turns everywhere, including biblical books. Ruth and Boaz's time on the threshing floor turns the book in a different direction, changing not only their lives but also Naomi's, as well as creating new life: a child who goes on to become an ancestor of Jesus.

As a writer, I love that most of chapter three is direct speech. We tell kids who are throwing nonverbal tantrums to "use your words," yet many of us also denigrate adult words as "all talk and no action." While Ruth certainly acts by showing up in Boaz's bed on the threshing floor, she then goes on to speak, as we saw last week, and this week Boaz blesses her in his response, and tells her his plan to either make her his wife or ensure that Naomi and her future is secured by directing the next-of-kin to step up. He also manifests his words, including the blessing, by giving Ruth six measures of barley to take back to Naomi.

Another turn happens when the next-of-kin declines to marry Ruth, leaving the way open for Boaz to do so. And then Boaz declares in front of witnesses that Boaz will marry Ruth, and then those witnesses bless them. After the marriage, the women not only bless but also name the baby. Right at the end, another turn occurs with the very last word, when we learn that Obed—and therefore Ruth—is an ancestor of David, who becomes a crucial and beloved king. Later in the Bible, foreign wives are sent away. Here, we learn that such a woman was the ancestor of Israel's most important king. This final turn reminds us that the Bible is not a monolith but a library, with a multiplicity of views.

In our cycle of reading, we begin the book of Esther this week as well, and the first reading ends with a huge turn—one that sets in motion all that is to come in the rest of this book. We'll delve into Esther that next week. Keep reading the Good Book!

**For further reflection:**

When you think of turns in the book of Ruth, does Ruth's refusal to return to Moab overshadow the turns in the story discussed above?

Think of your life in terms of turns or transitions. (It might be easier to just think of the past year or five years.) What have you chosen or experienced that changed the course of your life?

Check out Victor Hugo's poem "Boaz Asleep." Does it resonate with you? How does your imagination fill in gaps of the story?