



<sup>17</sup>So she gleaned in the field until even, and beat out that she had gleaned: and it was about an ephah of barley. <sup>18</sup>And she took it up, and went into the city: and her mother in law saw what she had gleaned: and she brought forth, and gave to her that she had reserved after she was sufficed. <sup>19</sup>And her mother in law said unto her, Where hast thou gleaned to day? and where wroughtest thou? blessed be he that did take knowledge of thee. And she shewed her mother in law with whom she had wrought, and said, The man's name with whom I wrought to day is Boaz. <sup>20</sup>And Naomi said unto her daughter in law, Blessed be he of the LORD, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead. And Naomi said unto her, The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen. <sup>21</sup>And Ruth the Moabitess said, He said unto me also, Thou shalt keep fast by my young men, until they have ended all my harvest. <sup>22</sup>And Naomi said unto Ruth her daughter in law, It is good, my daughter, that thou go out with his maidens, that they meet thee not in any other field. <sup>23</sup>So she kept fast by the maidens of Boaz to glean unto the end of barley harvest and of wheat harvest; and dwelt with her mother in law. (Ruth 2:17-23)

Cultivation, planting, weeding, watering, harvesting, and winnowing are all necessary concerns of gaining an increase from the grain harvest. Each step must be meticulously observed else all is vain. As we said in an earlier devotion on this Book, though the first step of a journey is critical, the journey cannot be completed until the LAST step is taken. That is true of the benefits gained from the labors of farming. You may do all that seems adequate – 1) Turning the soil; 2) Planting the seed; 3) Weeding the tender plants; 4) Watering when rains fail; and 5) harvesting the grain. But the grains of wheat and barley cannot be used until they have been winnowed. Some may not know the term, ‘winnowing,’ so I will explain: When the stalks of grain are removed from the field, the rich rain is stored in the budding tops. The grain is covered with protective shells of chaff which must be removed. The process of removal, winnowing, requires the grain heads to be beaten loose from the stalks, and the chaff to be separated from the grain. How is this last step achieved?

*“So she gleaned in the field until even, and beat out that she had gleaned.”* The stalks are beaten with a staff until the grain heads are separated from the stalk. Then the grain heads are winnowed by tossing the grain into the air so that the wind can blow away the useless chaff. The instrument, by the way, which was used in biblical times to toss the grain and chaff into the air was a three-forked tool resembling a pitchfork. It

was called (from the Latin) a “Tribulutam” which is the root word for the term, TRIBULATION. God often separates the chaff (unrepentant sinners) from the grain (true believers) by tribulation. His winds of fire and righteous preaching achieve that purpose. Wars, famine, draught, persecution – these are often used to fertilize with blood the heart of the Church and make it stronger (though it may suffer loss of numbers).

In the modern Church, much effort is expended to get a single confession of faith, but no more. The new convert is left to wonder just to what he has been converted. In the Churches of the Reformation, converts were made to have, at least, a fundamental understanding of who the Savior was that they were receiving. They knew the Gospel evidence that gave them the privilege to be sons and daughters of God. It is so in our AOC churches today by means of the Catechism found in the Book of Common Prayer. No one should come to Christ with their eyes closed. That is a winnowing process at the gate of the church, is it not?

“ . . . *and it was about an ephah of barley.*” This points to the zealotry of Ruth in her gleaning. She worked relentlessly all day to acquire such a large amount (about seven and a half gallons AFTER winnowing). She did not carry the stalks home to be beaten and winnowed with her mother-in-law’s help – she did it ALL in the field where the gleaning took place. Doing a job thoroughly and completely is a Christian virtue, and Ruth was full of virtue.

The presence of a woman of virtue is always a delight for the blessings they bring. “*And she took it up, and went into the city: and her mother in law saw what she had gleaned: and she brought forth, and gave to her that she had reserved after she was sufficed.*” Remember that Boaz had invited Ruth to eat with his maidens and servants in the field house where bread was baked for all. Ruth has apparently kept some bread from her share back for Naomi and Naomi is sufficed with more than enough as was Ruth. Christians do not hoard the blessings of God, but share freely with others as to self.

Perhaps because of the abundance of the gleanings, Naomi wonders in whose field Ruth has gleaned? It must be admitted that Ruth’s abundance gathered in the field was not only owing to her own labors, but the generosity of Boaz and the “Handfuls on Purpose” that was arrayed before Ruth. “*And her mother in law said unto her, Where hast thou gleaned to day? and where wroughtest thou? blessed be he that did take knowledge of thee. And she shewed her mother in law with whom she had wrought, and said, The man’s name with whom I wrought to day is Boaz.*” Naomi knew from the enormous amount that Ruth brought that someone must have added blessings to labor. And she learns immediately that it was BOAZ. When we see fellows among us who are continually blessed, joyful, and loving, we do not even need to ask who has blessed them – it is Christ!

“*And Naomi said unto her daughter in law, Blessed be he of the LORD, who hath not left off his kindness to the living and to the dead. And Naomi said unto her, The man is near of kin unto us, one of our next kinsmen.*” Naomi has truly come home to Bethlehem and the favored place God has given her. She ascribes every blessing to the Lord even if they came by the hand of a dear girl named Ruth and a kinsman named Boaz. God not only blesses the living but those whom we call dead (there are none dead in Christ for He is the God only of the living who are either on earth, or with Him in Heaven.) Naomi shares with Ruth the joyous news that Boaz is not just some other landlord, but a near kinsman to her.

I have the satisfying feeling that I am eavesdropping on a conversation of intense

interest uttered more than three thousand years ago. It is between two women whom I have come to love in Christ across all those miles and centuries – Ruth and Naomi. *“And Ruth the Moabitess said, He said unto me also, Thou shalt keep fast by my young men, until they have ended all my harvest.”* Ruth is not careful in sharing all details with the mother she loves – I say mother because no woman could have a better daughter than Ruth, even if a daughter-in-law. The writer, perhaps the prophet Samuel, reminds us again that Ruth is a Moabitess who is receiving this blessing from an Israelite.

A profound principle for us today is contained in the next line of Naomi: *“And Naomi said unto Ruth her daughter in law, It is good, my daughter, that thou go out with his maidens, that they meet thee not in any other field.”* First, note that Naomi considers Ruth to be every whit her daughter! I have young members of St. Andrews of whom I am proud and honored to consider as my sons and daughters. Secondly, Naomi counsels Ruth to glean in no other fields than those belonging to Boaz. It is this last lesson that we must learn thoroughly to obey. When we are called and chosen of God, we must labor only in His fields and not those of the world.

*“No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon.”* (Matt 6:24) Money cannot be the focus of any Christian. ANYTHING that eclipses the Light of Christ must be dispensed with. Idolatry is nothing more than spiritual adultery – turning from a devoted service and following of God to the lesser things of this world. *“And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word.”* (1 Kings 18:21) Unfortunately, too many professing Christians, and even clergy, are answering not a word when the great sins of our time are paraded out as matters of acceptance. They are guilty of the sin of silence in the face of sin!

*“So she kept fast by the maidens of Boaz to glean unto the end of barley harvest and of wheat harvest; and dwelt with her mother in law.”* Do you see the pure heart of this lovely girl, Ruth? She follows the good counsel of the one who loves her in Bethlehem – Naomi. She will remain faithful to that counsel given by Naomi (who means her only good) and will labor only in the fields of Boaz until harvest time is over. Will you, my friends, serve the Master until the Harvest is complete and the fever of life is over? Will you say, even at the last, *“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.”* (Psalms 23:6)?