

# Reflections in Ruth, an Old Testament Story: A

When all the safety nets have gone...

**Opening question:** What do you do when everything you knew and loved has been taken from you?

Naomi, her husband and two sons left Israel during a time of famine and turmoil and went to the neighbouring land of Moab. The two sons marry local girls, but within 10 years all the men died.

**Question:** what do you think Naomi should do?

Naomi, now destitute, decides to return home, and tells the two young women, Orpah and Ruth to return to their families. Orpah does so, but Ruth promises to stay with Naomi, saying: *Wherever you go, I will go; wherever you live, I will live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God.* So, the two women journey back to the land of Israel and return to Naomi's home town of

## To think about:

Why was it only the men who died? Was there a plague? Or a war?

Is this a literary device?

Why might being without men make it hard for the women?

Has Naomi made a good decision? What is she expecting to happen? Why does Ruth go with her?

Where might we see similar situations today? Can we draw any parallels between this story and the Covid-19 crisis?

*After the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus the disciples return to fishing. Look at John 21:4-14*

*Do you think that there are similarities between Naomi's story and the way that the disciples behaved?*

Lord,

Sometimes it seems as though we have nothing left and no one to turn to.

Help us to know where our security really lies and to identify those whom we can trust to help us.

Let us be those who can be relied on in a crisis and demonstrate loyalty and commitment.

**Amen.**

# Reflections in Ruth, an Old Testament Story: B

Grasping at straws

Opening question: What kind of risks have you ever taken?

Ruth and Naomi need to eat, so Ruth offers to go to the fields to 'glean'. In the Laws of the Israelites instructions are given to farmers not to harvest to the edges of their fields but leave these gleanings for the poor and Ruth finds herself picking up the barley in the field of a relative of Naomi's called Boaz.

Question: What does this action of Ruth's suggest about the status of these two women?

When Boaz himself comes out to the fields he sees Ruth and ensures that she is looked after, even going so far as to talk to her and instruct the men to pull extra stalks of barley out of the bundles for her. Naomi, seeing how much grain she returns with and finding out in whose field she has been working, praises God for his blessings on them.

To think about:

What do we learn of the character of Ruth from her actions? In many ways Ruth is taking a risk. What do you think is the biggest risk she is taking? What kind of man does Boaz appear to be?

What part do *you* think God plays in this story?

Think about the risks that people take to get food or find safety today. You might want to think about the migrants crossing the channel in small boats or people having to cross minefields to get water. Who could be the Boaz to people in these situations?

The first church chose people to serve food to the widows in the community (Acts 6: 1- 7) Is this a better way of dealing with deprivation than gleaning laws?

*Read the law for yourself here*

Prayer

Father God,

there are so many people in the world like Ruth, scratching a living from what others leave behind.

Help us to see where we can be like Boaz and offer a helping hand.

Amen

# Reflections in Ruth, an Old Testament story: C

Looking for love...

Opening question: Last time we thought about the risks that people take when looking for food. How can looking for love make us vulnerable too?

Naomi comes up with a scheme to make Boaz into a new husband for Ruth. She sends her back to the fields belonging to Boaz, remembering that a widow must be looked after by her husband's relatives. Ruth, following Naomi's instructions, goes to Boaz while he and his men are asleep and lies down close to him.

Question: What do you think Boaz will do when he finds this poor woman lying there? Is Naomi putting Ruth in danger or acting wisely? Are there any risks for Boaz in the way that events are unfolding?

When he awakes and finds her there, he is very pleased and says she is showing family loyalty. He promises to do what he can, but there is a relative who has an even closer connection to her husband's family, and he will have to have the chance to care for Ruth. Before she leaves early the next morning, Boaz gives her a large quantity of grain to take home.

To think about:

Why do you think Ruth follows Naomi's instructions?

Was she right to do so?

Are we seeing evidence of a society that cares for orphans and widows, or do we see women treated as property?

How do arranged marriages work today? How do these compare to Ruth's situation?

There are several examples in the Bible of servants being sent to find wives for young men and asking God for success in their mission. Should faith or prayer have any role in the choice of a partner today?

Prayer

Father God,

You know all things and you search and know peoples' hearts.

Guide and protect those who are seeking love and acceptance and give them wisdom and success,

so that their lives may be graced with love.

Amen

# Reflections in Ruth, an Old Testament story: D

## Market place marriage

Opening Question: Where do you think is the best place for a proposal of marriage to take place?

Boaz goes and sits at the town gate, where all the financial business of the town was run at that time. The other relative comes by, and Boaz offers him the field that had belonged to Naomi's husband. In front of ten witnesses he agrees to buy it.

Boaz then tells the relative that if he takes the field, then he must have Ruth too, so that the field remains in the correct family. At that point, the man declines the field, as his own children would not be able to inherit the field. Boaz buys the field and declares in front of the townspeople that Ruth will become his wife. Ruth and Boaz have a son, who becomes the grandfather of David, who in turn becomes King of Israel.

Question: What will Boaz do now? Is this the turning point in the story? Where do you think Ruth and Naomi are at this point in the tale?

To think about

Is this a marriage or a financial transaction? Who was really driving events in this story? Naomi, Ruth or Boaz? Does the answer to this question change the way you feel about the story?

What does this say about love and marriage?

God of all people,

Help us to step back and see the bigger picture of our lives,

Trusting that your ways are not the same as ours, but that you are ultimately in control.

Help us also to see the part that we need to play in striving for justice and mercy.

Amen.

Jewish laws forbade marriage to foreigners, but Ruth is the grandmother of King David and listed in the lineage of Jesus in Matthew 1. Paul in the letter to the Galatians (3:28) says there is "neither Jew nor Gentile..."

Think about this in relation to the current issues of racial discrimination and prejudice.