



*Welcome to our reflection on Ruth Chapter 2, for the second week of Bible Month 2020...*

This is the second of a series of four reflections for Bible Month, which this year focusses on the book of Ruth. Each will reflect on one chapter of the book from a different perspective. The material for these reflections has come from the '30 days with Ruth' Bible Month material, offered by the Leaders of Worship and Preachers Trust. Today's reflection is inspired by, and directly draws on, resources prepared by Dr Jasmine Devadason who describes herself as an (im)migrant living in a foreign land...an Indian with British Citizenship, a woman, an ordained minister". [The phrases in " " come from her material in '30 days with Ruth']

As we begin, find a comfortable place ...you probably need about half an hour when you hope you will not be interrupted...you might also want to have with you those things which help you to reflect...you might choose to have a notebook and pen handy, or some paper and coloured pencils...a holding cross...or a lit candle...whatever helps you to be both relaxed and attentive to God and to yourself...

This week we use some insights from feminist theology to reflect with Ruth Chapter 2.

So as we begin, let us pray...

*Gracious God, as we pause in your presence and in the company of scripture, we trust to your care all those people and situations which are on our minds...help us in this time to be attentive to the words we encounter, to those things which you will help us to see and hear, to our own story and the stories of those around us...help us to learn and grow as we reflect. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

You heard in our introduction how Jasmine introduces herself...as “an (im)migrant living in a foreign land...an Indian with British Citizenship, a woman, an ordained minister”. She goes on to say “These are only a few of my identities and experiences that influence the way I read the text”.

You might like to pause for a moment and think about your identities and experiences which might influence the way you read scripture...and whether you are aware of those influences as you read...

Jasmine goes on to tell us something of her experiences both of receiving generosity from others, and also of being looked at as “a foreigner, an outsider” and of being “not well-received as a minister in the church, for I was a woman and a foreign woman in this context”...

But she says “...my faith in Jesus Christ strengthens me to resist all difficulties in life, providing a spirituality of resistance to any form of domination and discrimination that I face, and helps me to celebrate my multiple identities”

She reminds us that a feminist approach to reading the bible rejects the idea that there is only one big story to be found...suggesting that there are diverse stories within what is traditionally seen as *the* story. Jasmine says “Approaching a biblical text from the perspective of an Asian woman is to identify different layers of patriarchal power and domination embedded in the text. One way is to retell the story from the experience of a woman represented in the text...[it is good for us to] hear this story from the mouth of Ruth, because she is an immigrant struggling to survive in a foreign context, and can be considered to be the ‘other’ in the story”...

Ruth’s narrative is ‘story’ or ‘testimony’...”connecting with the question we are asking ourselves as Methodist people this year... ‘So, what’s the story?...’

So, as we wonder, we are going to spend some reading Ruth Chapter 2. We have it here from the New Revised Standard Version, which is a modern translation of the Hebrew text, and from 'The Message', which is a paraphrase where we hear scripture in language which tries to reflect the way we speak and use language today. You may also like to read from another translation or paraphrase.

### Ruth Chapter 1 (NRSV)

Now Naomi had a kinsman on her husband's side, a prominent rich man, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, 'Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone in whose sight I may find favour.' She said to her, 'Go, my daughter.' So she went. She came and gleaned in the field behind the reapers. As it happened, she came to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech. Just then Boaz came from Bethlehem. He said to the reapers, 'The LORD be with you.' They answered, 'The LORD bless you.' Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, 'To whom does this young woman belong?' The servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, 'She is the Moabite who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. She said, "Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the reapers." So she came, and she has been on her feet from early this morning until now, without resting even for a moment.'

Then Boaz said to Ruth, 'Now listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. Keep your eyes on the field that is being reaped, and follow behind them. I have ordered the young men not to bother you. If you get thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn.' Then she fell prostrate, with her face to the ground, and said to him, 'Why have I found favour in your sight, that

you should take notice of me, when I am a foreigner?’ But Boaz answered her, ‘All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. May the LORD reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!’ Then she said, ‘May I continue to find favour in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, even though I am not one of your servants.’ At mealtime Boaz said to her, ‘Come here, and eat some of this bread, and dip your morsel in the sour wine.’ So she sat beside the reapers, and he heaped up for her some parched grain. She ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over. When she got up to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, ‘Let her glean even among the standing sheaves, and do not reproach her. You must also pull out some handfuls for her from the bundles, and leave them for her to glean, and do not rebuke her.’

So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. She picked it up and came into the town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gleaned. Then she took out and gave her what was left over after she herself had been satisfied. Her mother-in-law said to her, ‘Where did you glean today? And where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you.’ So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, and said, ‘The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz.’ Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, ‘Blessed be he by the LORD, whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead!’ Naomi also said to her, ‘The man is a relative of ours, one of our nearest kin.’ Then Ruth the Moabite said, ‘He even said to me, “Stay close by my servants, until they have finished all my harvest.” ’ Naomi said to Ruth,

her daughter-in-law, 'It is better, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, otherwise you might be bothered in another field.' So she stayed close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests; and she lived with her mother-in-law.

## Ruth Chapter 2 (The Message)

It so happened that Naomi had a relative by marriage, a man prominent and rich, connected with Elimelech's family. His name was Boaz.

One day Ruth, the Moabite foreigner, said to Naomi, "I'm going to work; I'm going out to glean among the sheaves, following after some harvester who will treat me kindly."

Naomi said, "Go ahead, dear daughter."

And so she set out. She went and started gleaning in a field, following in the wake of the harvesters. Eventually she ended up in the part of the field owned by Boaz, her father-in-law Elimelech's relative. A little later Boaz came out from Bethlehem, greeting his harvesters, "GOD be with you!" They replied, "And GOD bless you!"

Boaz asked his young servant who was foreman over the farm hands, "Who is this young woman? Where did she come from?"

The foreman said, "Why, that's the Moabite girl, the one who came with Naomi from the country of Moab. She asked permission. 'Let me glean,' she said, 'and gather among the sheaves following after your harvesters.' She's been at it steady ever since, from early morning until now, without so much as a break."

Then Boaz spoke to Ruth: "Listen, my daughter. From now on don't go to any other field to glean—stay right here in this one. And stay close to my young women. Watch where they are harvesting and follow them. And don't worry about a thing; I've given orders to my servants not to harass you.

When you get thirsty, feel free to go and drink from the water buckets that the servants have filled.”

She dropped to her knees, then bowed her face to the ground. “How does this happen that you should pick me out and treat me so kindly—*me*, a foreigner?”

Boaz answered her, “I’ve heard all about you—heard about the way you treated your mother-in-law after the death of her husband, and how you left your father and mother and the land of your birth and have come to live among a bunch of total strangers. GOD reward you well for what you’ve done—and with a generous bonus besides from GOD, to whom you’ve come seeking protection under his wings.”

She said, “Oh sir, such grace, such kindness—I don’t deserve it. You’ve touched my heart, treated me like one of your own. And I don’t even belong here!”

At the lunch break, Boaz said to her, “Come over here; eat some bread. Dip it in the wine.”

So she joined the harvesters. Boaz passed the roasted grain to her. She ate her fill and even had some left over. When she got up to go back to work, Boaz ordered his servants: “Let her glean where there’s still plenty of grain on the ground—make it easy for her. Better yet, pull some of the good stuff out and leave it for her to glean. Give her special treatment.”

Ruth gleaned in the field until evening. When she threshed out what she had gathered, she ended up with nearly a full sack of barley! She gathered up her gleanings, went back to town, and showed her mother-in-law the results of her day’s work; she also gave her the leftovers from her lunch. Naomi asked her, “So where did you glean today? Whose field? GOD bless whoever it was who took such good care of you!”

Ruth told her mother-in-law, “The man with whom I worked today? His name is Boaz.”

Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, “Why, GOD bless that man! GOD hasn’t quite walked out on us after all! He still loves us, in bad times as well as good!”

Naomi went on, “That man, Ruth, is one of our circle of covenant redeemers, a close relative of ours!”

Ruth the Moabitess said, “Well, listen to this: He also told me, ‘Stick with my workers until my harvesting is finished.’”

Naomi said to Ruth, “That’s wonderful, dear daughter! Do that! You’ll be safe in the company of his young women; no danger now of being raped in some stranger’s field.”

So Ruth did it—she stuck close to Boaz’s young women, gleaning in the fields daily until both the barley and wheat harvesting were finished. And she continued living with her mother-in-law.

Now we have begun to become familiar with the story, begin to wonder how it might read if it were written by Ruth herself. Using your own experience, ‘read between the lines’, trying to notice what is *not* said in what you read in the bible, as well as what *is* there. You might like to pause here and jot down some notes, sketch or doodle, you might even write an account in Ruth’s voice, or an imaginary letter from Ruth to someone she is close to – maybe to Orpah. What might Ruth need to tell which is not in the account which is handed down to us?

As you think about Ruth and what story she might tell...wonder also about those women who are migrants in our time and place...those who, like Ruth in Bethlehem, are foreigners, outsiders, in Leeds this week. What might they need? What might they be afraid of? What gifts might they bring? What do you know about the ways they might be able to seek support?

Is your church or local community already involved in welcoming those from other places and cultures?

What would you need to know, to find out, if your local church is to offer the best friendship it can to those who are building a new life among us?

Again, you might like to pause here and jot down some notes, sketch or doodle...you may need to talk with someone you know, you may need to talk with God...

When you are ready, set aside anything you may have been doing to help you reflect, pause and take a few deep breaths...

As you prepare to return to the things of this day, you may choose to pray, inspired by what you have discovered...or to draw this time to a close by praying the Lord's Prayer...

Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy Name;  
thy kingdom come;  
thy will be done;  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses,  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation;  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom,  
the power, and the glory,  
for ever and ever.  
Amen.