



*Welcome to our reflection on Ruth Chapter 3,
for the third week of Bible Month 2020...*

This is the third 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 the lens of 'power', and where it lies, to reflect with Ruth Chapter 3. As last week, this is another challenging 'way in' to scripture, taking "a postcolonial approach". Particularly in our current circumstances, where many are asking big questions about the way society works, and who has had power in the past, or may have power in the present, we need to bring those questions into our reflection with the Bible.

Caution: As we have begun to explore in past weeks, all scripture has the power to interact with our own stories to

both confront and challenge, and to comfort or encourage us. Some of us may have had experiences which will make Ruth chapter 3 a particularly challenging read. If this is you, please do be gentle with yourself, and consider if, and how, it is right for you to spend time with this text. If you need to have a conversation with someone else about this, please know that you can contact any of the Circuit staff, either to talk things through, or for suggestions about who else might offer companionship and conversation.

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.

Our approach to the text this week wonders about the power relationships between the characters and groups in the text, and about the imbalances in the relationships of those who read it. "Who benefits in the text and how have we come to read the story since then?" As we began to notice last week, "no one reads the Bible unbiased...how we read it is influenced by our context, social location and experience".

Jasmine says "Reading the story of Ruth from a postcolonial perspective brings out three important theological themes..."

"Firstly, the narrative of Ruth resists the idea that ethnicity is the most important part of an identity. Secondly, in the story of Ruth we recognise that God is not confined to the

temple settings. God is understood in different ways in different contexts and yet God's sovereignty remains. Thirdly, the narrative of Ruth resists any borders that stop people from moving and migrating. Ruth's story shows people who are free to cross borders for life, livelihood and security."

She says, "The story of Ruth calls for a spirituality of resistance, where we stand in courage to resist and protest any dominance and discrimination today. Resistance is a gift from God for all people of God. Be bold and be strong to stand for the values of the Kingdom of God with no compromise."

So, we are going to spend some reading Ruth Chapter 3. 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 3 (NRSV)

Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, 'My daughter, I need to seek some security for you, so that it may be well with you. Now here is our kinsman Boaz, with whose young women you have been working. See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing-floor. Now wash and anoint yourself, and put on your best clothes and go down to the threshing-floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, observe the place where he lies; then, go and uncover his feet and lie down; and he will tell you what to do.' She said to her, 'All that you tell me I will do.'

So she went down to the threshing-floor and did just as her mother-in-law had instructed her. When Boaz had eaten and drunk, and he was in a contented mood, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she came quietly and uncovered his feet, and lay down. At midnight the man was startled and turned over, and there, lying at his feet, was a woman! He said, 'Who are you?' And she answered, 'I am Ruth, your servant; spread your cloak over your servant, for you are next-of-kin.' He said, 'May you be blessed by the LORD, my daughter; this last instance of your loyalty is better than the first; you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich. And now, my daughter, do not be afraid; I will do for you all that you ask, for all the assembly of my people know that you are a worthy woman. But now, though it is true that I am a near kinsman, there is another kinsman more closely related than I. Remain this night, and in the morning, if he will act as next-of-kin for you, good; let him do so. If he is not willing to act as next-of-kin for you, then, as the LORD lives, I will act as next-of-kin for you. Lie down until the morning.'

So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before one person could recognize another; for he said, 'It must not be known that the woman came to the threshing-floor.' Then he said, 'Bring the cloak you are wearing and hold it out.' So she held it, and he measured out six measures of barley, and put it on her back; then he went into the city. She came to her mother-in-law, who said, 'How did things go with you, my daughter?' Then she told her all that the man had done for her, saying, 'He gave me these six measures of barley, for he said, "Do not go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed."' She replied, 'Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out, for the man will not rest, but will settle the matter today.'

Ruth Chapter 3 (The Message)

One day her mother-in-law Naomi said to Ruth, “My dear daughter, isn’t it about time I arranged a good home for you so you can have a happy life? And isn’t Boaz our close relative, the one with whose young women you’ve been working? Maybe it’s time to make our move. Tonight is the night of Boaz’s barley harvest at the threshing floor.

“Take a bath. Put on some perfume. Get all dressed up and go to the threshing floor. But don’t let him know you’re there until the party is well under way and he’s had plenty of food and drink. When you see him slipping off to sleep, watch where he lies down and then go there. Lie at his feet to let him know that you are available to him for marriage. Then wait and see what he says. He’ll tell you what to do.”

Ruth said, “If you say so, I’ll do it, just as you’ve told me.”

She went down to the threshing floor and put her mother-in-law’s plan into action.

Boaz had a good time, eating and drinking his fill—he felt great. Then he went off to get some sleep, lying down at the end of a stack of barley. Ruth quietly followed; she lay down to signal her availability for marriage.

In the middle of the night the man was suddenly startled and sat up. Surprise! This woman asleep at his feet!

He said, “And who are you?”

She said, “I am Ruth, your maiden; take me under your protecting wing. You’re my close relative, you know, in the circle of covenant redeemers—you do have the right to marry me.”

He said, “GOD bless you, my dear daughter! What a splendid expression of love! And when you could have had your pick of any of the young men around. And now, my dear daughter, don’t you worry about a thing; I’ll do all you could want or ask. Everybody in town knows what a courageous woman you are—a real prize! You’re right, I am a close relative to you, but there is one even closer

than I am. So stay the rest of the night. In the morning, if he wants to exercise his customary rights and responsibilities as the closest covenant redeemer, he'll have his chance; but if he isn't interested, as GOD lives, I'll do it. Now go back to sleep until morning."

Ruth slept at his feet until dawn, but she got up while it was still dark and wouldn't be recognized. Then Boaz said to himself, "No one must know that Ruth came to the threshing floor."

So Boaz said, "Bring the shawl you're wearing and spread it out."

She spread it out and he poured it full of barley, six measures, and put it on her shoulders. Then she went back to town.

When she came to her mother-in-law, Naomi asked, "And how did things go, my dear daughter?"

Ruth told her everything that the man had done for her, adding, "And he gave me all this barley besides—six quarts! He told me, 'You can't go back empty-handed to your mother-in-law!'"

Naomi said, "Sit back and relax, my dear daughter, until we find out how things turn out; that man isn't going to fool around. Mark my words, he's going to get everything wrapped up today."

Now we have begun to be familiar with this part of the story, think about the characters. Choose the character you identify with most, or are most drawn to reflect with today, and wonder why you relate to this character particularly. Think about their role in the text, and the role of others. Why are they important?

As the character you have chosen, do you have power in the story? If so, what kind of power do you have and how

do you use it? Why might you behave in the way that you do?

You might like to pause here and take some time to wonder...

Having thought about this one character, you might like to pause again and think about the ways in which others use their power in relation to your character...

Now imagine what one character might have to say to another, perhaps five or ten years after the end of the story as we have it in the book of Ruth...

You might like to write a 'postcard' from your character to another, or from someone else in the story to the character you have been reflecting with, at that point in the future...

Notice what you discover about the relationships in the story as you do this...

In the past couple of weeks, we have imagined ourselves 'into' the text in different ways. We have thought about the story of the text and our own personal stories. This week, you might choose to work differently...

You might think about your own wider context...social, political, cultural and religious...and wonder about how that context influences the way you read scripture.

For example, might scripture 'read' differently from your place in Leeds, in comparison to reading, say, in rural North Yorkshire, in Moscow, in a refugee camp in Bangladesh, or another place... perhaps one that has been in the news headlines recently?

What is the most important feature of a person's identity in your context? Where might people encounter God in the

place where you live? What boundaries and borders are important there?

Who has power in your context, and how can they exercise it? Who is dominant and who is discriminated against?

How does the approach to reading scripture which we are introduced to today challenge you in your context? How might your faith help you to resist misuse of power?

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.