

Ruth Bible Study

Fall 2020

Where Does Loss Push Us?

Ruth 1:1-18

What stands out when you hear this portion of the book?

What might have been going through Naomi's mind when she first moved to Moab? And then later when she decided to return to Bethlehem?

If you no longer live in your "hometown" what motivated you to move? What was that experience like?

History

- What is the first thing you think of when you hear the name Bethlehem?
- Sometimes places become markers of significant events that have shaped a nation or society.
 - Are there places like that in the USA? Here in Pennsylvania? Here in the Lehigh Valley?
- The other location mentioned is Moab.
 - Read Deuteronomy 23:3-6
 - How might the original hearers of this text have reacted to this story of seeking refuge in Moab?
- The text says that the events took place "in the days of the judging of the judges."
 - Read Judges 17:6; 18:1; 21:25
 - What does a society need to do to move from chaos to stability?
- Some speculate that this book might have first appeared after the Exile. If so what kind of impact might it have made?
 - Read Ezra 9:1-2 and Nehemiah 13:23-27
 - Is there a country or group of people today that might be an equivalent of Moab in our eyes?

Context

- The word repeated most often in this section is "return".
 - How does this word tie into issues of immigration, home, and repentance?
- What constitutes "family"?
 - Is Ruth a part of Naomi's "family"?
- What do we learn about Naomi from her speeches to her daughters-in-law?
- Read Deuteronomy 25:5-6
 - How does this help us to understand what is going on here?
- What do we learn about Ruth from her words and actions?
- *Finitum capax infinitum*
 - Where do you encounter God? Other persons, places, objects?
 - How might original readers have reacted to the way Ruth is portrayed?
- Ruth's words are sometimes read at weddings.
 - How do these words fit that situation?
 - Read 2 Samuel 15:21 and 2 Kings 2:2 and compare.
- This book challenges many stereotypes.
 - Like mothers-in-law and relationships within families.
 - Are other stereotypes challenged in this section?
 - Are other groups today viewed in a similar way to the Moabites of old?
- Naomi and Ruth, as women, faced significant challenges when they were left alone.
 - How might this be similar to situations in this day and time?

Where Does Loyalty Pull Us?

Ruth 1:19-2:23

If you were making this book into a movie who would play Naomi? Ruth? What qualities would you be looking for as you cast these parts?

Imagine that you are preparing for a high school class reunion this summer. What would you want to share about yourself and your life with your former classmates? What kinds of feelings would come up for you if you were preparing for a reunion or a homecoming of another type after a long absence?

Context

- The women return to Bethlehem so Ruth is now the immigrant. Now a new character is introduced – Boaz. Boaz is a relative of Elimelech and he is a well-off farmer: “A prominent rich man” “A man of standing” “A man of substance” “A man of value or worth”
 - Does this value or worth come from his wealth? If not then from where?
 - How does Boaz show his worth?
 - What makes someone a person of “value” or “worth”?
 - Who would play Boaz in your new movie based on this book?
- Ruth goes to the fields of Boaz to glean. Gleaning is prescribed by law.
 - Read Leviticus 23:22 and Deuteronomy 24:21-22.
 - What do you think of this?
 - How do you think people during the time of Ezra-Nehemiah heard this after recently returning from exile in Babylon?
 - Is there an equivalent to gleaning in our present society or community?
- Ruth did not “belong” to anyone since her father and husband were both dead. She was like a free agent. She didn’t have to rely on charity. She could provide for herself by being “the other woman” – a prostitute or adulteress.
 - Do you think this was a viable option for Ruth?
 - How about for widows or aliens today?
 - How does our society view widows? Does it depend on their age or where they are from?
 - Are there similarities between Ruth’s life and the lives of immigrant women today?
- In 2:3 Ruth “happens” to end up at a field belonging to Boaz. Perhaps God had a hand in this.
 - Have there been times in your life where a “coincidence” might actually be perceived as God’s activity in your life?
- Is Ruth really the main character in this book? What about Naomi?
 - Reflect on her name change, the use of harvest and grain and meal, the presence and absence of God, and the power of Naomi’s lament (1:20-21) and surprise (2:20, 22).
- Think about how it feels to return home in certain situations:
 - As a college student from a small town who drops out mid-semester
 - As a fully qualified/educated young adult who can’t find work in their field
 - As a long time worker who returns home with the contents of their desk packed in a box due to company downsizing
 - As an older adult who is told by their doctor that they can no longer live alone
- Naomi’s words express deep sorrow. Is there room in the church’s language to express deep sorrow today?
 - Do any hymns, prayers, or parts of the liturgy come to mind?
 - Scripture points us to a God who works through suffering rather than through glory. We get to the truth through the cross, not by going around it.
 - Do you see this idea at work in this section? How?

Where Does Risk Take Us?

Ruth 3

- What is going on in this chapter?
 - What is the “threshing floor?”
 - Is there a comparable place in our current community?
 - How do you think Ruth felt about following these instructions?
 - Let’s look at Deuteronomy 25:5-10 and see if it helps us understand this section.
 - Does it apply in this instance? Why or why not?
 - Proverbs 31:10-31
 - What do you think of this description?
 - What would you add or subtract today?
- What is this chapter really about?
 - What sort of things happen at midnight?
 - What key words do you see in this section?
 - What is the last instance of kindness?
- How is God at work in this chapter?
 - Is God working through Boaz’s actions?
- Do you think Ruth is taking a risk in this situation?
 - When is it appropriate to take risks or even to break the law?
 - Is civil disobedience ever appropriate?
 - What do you think of the phrase “extraordinary times call for extraordinary measures”?

Where Does Hope Lead Us?

Ruth 4

Context

- The city gate
 - Functioned like a courthouse back then. Why do you think it did?
 - What role do prominent structures play in our communities?
 - Are there similarities to the city gate?
- The reaction of “all the people” in verses 11-12 – make Ruth like Rachel and Leah
 - What do we know about Rachel – Genesis 29:1-24
 - Leah – Genesis 35:16-26
 - Tamar – Genesis 38:1-30
 - What do you think of when you hear the term “founding fathers”?
 - Are there any female figures who would be equivalent?
- What about this other heir?
 - What does he seem to be concerned with?
 - Do you find this part humorous?
 - What about Boaz’s actions?
- Comment on the final blessing in the book, verses 14-15
 - What role have others played in bringing God’s blessings to you?
- What about this genealogy?
 - Was it necessary for this story?
 - Compare Matthew 1:1-16
 - What do you notice
 - What do the five women mentioned in Matthew have in common?
 - Why do you suppose they are included?
- What significance is there in knowing that David’s grandmother was Moabite?
- How does reading Ruth help us understand and talk about our current situation in society?
 - How might the church be challenged?
 - Who lives on the margins today?
 - Who is most vulnerable in society today?
 - Is there any hope or promise in immigrants today like there ended up being in Ruth?
- Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz do what is right
 - Compare Judges 21:25
 - Why did they do this?
 - Are we motivated to do the right thing?
 - What opportunities do we have to help those on the margins?
 - What role should the church play, if any, in inspiring inclusion like what happened with Ruth?