

Ruth 1: 1-22

November 4, 2012

Read chapter 1

How delicious was THAT? Don't you just love that story? It's just plain wonderful. I has all the marks of a story that's loved: sweet in the mouth of the teller, polished smooth by the tongues of generations of story tellers who let the taste linger...and even as they told it, they hungered for it again and again and again...it tastes like...it tastes like home.

This story is partly about home. What is home....where is home, who is home....

The story starts with a crisis, - the famine. There follows another crisis...the death of Naomi's husband, and sons.

When things happen like that, when the world tilts – when the numbness wears off and we begin to deal with the tragedy, whatever it is....

We want two things

We don't want to be alone, and we want to go home.

Right?

When it comes right down to it, no pretending, no posing and posturing, your bare feet and bare face and bare heart self....when you're hurting you don't want to be alone and you want to go home.

This is about not being alone. And this is about home.

Have you ever had the experience of being a foreigner? Gone to another country? Gone to a place where you were not at home?

When you're in a situation like that, what are the things that tell you you're not at home?

- language, difficulty with communication
- money,
- not being sure what's acceptable
- food, clothing, customs, religion, laws,
- the feelings of being far from home, no friends.

When I lived in Scotland, and then again in Australia – even though there were so many similarities, still, I struggled to understand what was being said (eg when someone invited you for “tea” – what does that mean? Tea? A meal?)

In a small way, living left-handed in a right handed world....

Living as a heavy person in a world where furniture and clothing and expectations are centred around small bodies

These are things I’ve experienced myself – what about you? YOUR experiences of being a foreigner...someone who doesn’t quite fit in. Someone who doesn’t belong – who isn’t like everyone else....or whose ways of being and doing are simply not the norm?

Think about that now....not so much with your head but with your emotions. What does it FEEL like

Not to see yourself mirrored in the world around you? To look around and see no sign of your deepest self – or when you DO see it, it’s caricatured or twisted. What does that feel like? Not to have your own experience, your questions, your values, your feelings

Affirmed, accepted, given existence by being visible?

This is one of the key questions in the book of Ruth. To be a foreigner – who are the foreigners in our midst

How we treat them

How we define who is a foreigner

And how do we live when WE are the foreigner.

This is one of the lenses through which I want us to see this story.

It was written in a time in Israel’s history when the government and religious establishment was trying to keep Jewish bloodlines pure. Intermarriage with foreigners was forbidden....the ideal nation they were trying to create only included purebred Jews.

(someone else tried that more recently – and many still live with that mentality)

What’s a good way to oppose that kind of thinking?

Laws? Speeches? Petitions? Marches? Education? Parades? Letters to the editor? These are all good

But someone here was brilliant.

Want to battle a tyrant? Want to put the KKK or their equivalent in their place?

TELL A STORY.

A story is so powerful. – it's an ingenious, subversive way to show bigotry for what it is.

Tell a story.

And that's what was done. Into a political climate that rejected and outlawed foreigners

Someone remembers, and then tells a simple love story

And that story crumbles the foundations of that racism and shows the political stance as the insanity that it really is. It's an earth-tilting, government toppling, tyrant mocking story. A simple love story.

And the love story goes like this: (READ ALL OF CHAPTER I)

Naomi and Ruth, together, supporting each other and committed to each other for life, make a life together. Naomi arranges for Ruth to meet Boaz, a wealthy relative. They meet, they marry, and they have a child – a son – Obed. (read the whole thing – it's beautifully written)

Obed is the father of Jesse, who is the father of David the greatest King that Israel ever had. And David is the great great great...grandfather of Jesus.

You see? A simple love story that says to the purest of the purebloods – the 4th century BCE equivalent of Lucius Malfoy....

Says to them

YOU have muggle blood in you too. Says to their equivalent of Adolph Hitler – your grandmother was a Jew

Ruth – a foreign woman – is your grandmother! Foreigners are part of the family.

You have NO RIGHT in society or church or anywhere

To exclude those you have decided are not “one of you”

There are, in fact, NO FOREIGNERS.

And home? Home is

Not a place but a relationship

Home is living in the love and justice and mercy and humility of life in God.

And home is living out that love and justice for ourselves and for all people.

You want another good way to topple an empire? Challenge the principalities and powers?
Bring down the mighty from their thrones and lift up those of low degree?

Set the table. Have a meal. Invite everyone. It doesn't get more powerful than that.

IN the simple yet profound commitment of these two women to each other in a society that counted them as nothing...we have a glimpse into the heart and will of God

This text is a marvelous way to begin asking ourselves the questions that are truly at the core of what it means to be a faithful person, a faithful church, a faithful society....to really do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with God.

In this story we hear a call to walk with one another

Like Ruth, whose partner in the journey was an old woman who might end up being a burden

Like Naomi, whose partner in the journey was a foreign daughter in law who might end up being more trouble than she was worth

Like both of them, a call to walk even when the terrain is new and the company may not be of our own choosing....

Like both of them who risked a journey to a place not familiar and learned to call it, to MAKE it home

We are called by God in this text to help God create a world where all God's creatures are at home

And we are not alone

Thanks be to God.