

Ruth - Beauty for Bitterness

1 In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land. So a man from Bethlehem in Judah, together with his wife and two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab. ² The man's name was Elimelek, his wife's name was Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Kilion. They were Ephrathites from Bethlehem, Judah. And they went to Moab and lived there.

³ Now Elimelek, Naomi's husband, died, and she was left with her two sons. ⁴ They married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. After they had lived there about ten years, ⁵ both Mahlon and Kilion also died, and Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband.

⁶ When Naomi heard in Moab that the LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, she and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. ⁷ With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.

⁸ Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, "Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the LORD show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. ⁹ May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband."

Then she kissed them goodbye and they wept aloud ¹⁰ and said to her, "We will go back with you to your people."

¹¹ But Naomi said, "Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands?" ¹² Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me—even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons—¹³ would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD's hand has turned against me!"

¹⁴ At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.

¹⁵ "Look," said Naomi, "your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her."

¹⁶ But Ruth replied, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. ¹⁷ Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me." ¹⁸ When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

¹⁹ So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, "Can this be Naomi?"

²⁰ "Don't call me Naomi, ^[b]" she told them. "Call me Mara, ^[c] because the Almighty ^[d] has made my life very bitter. ²¹ I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The LORD has afflicted ^[e] me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me."

²² So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.

[NIV]

Pinocchio - Becoming Human

There is a famous Fairy Tale about a wooden puppet.



He was made by a woodcarver named Gepetto



Do you remember what this puppet really wanted?

To be real.

There were things he could do because he wasn't real.



But as time went on, he protected himself from things that he thought would hurt others or himself by lying.



He didn't realize that these lies were actually the thing that kept him from being real.

From loving and being loved.

He lied because he was afraid.

Afraid people wouldn't accept him or like him.



But the truth is, those who love you will always love you.

BEAUTY FOR BITTERNESS



When You Don't feel Turning that Frown Upside Down

We are uncomfortable with difficult feelings in ourselves and others.

We label them as BAD.

It is not sinful to feel angry, sad, despondent, afraid, complacent, anxious.

In your anger, do not sin.

It is sinful, however, to harm others and yourself.

It is sinful to seek to control others for your own comfort.

It is unwise/foolish to even try.

So although the things we may say are true, they are less than worthless and downright insensitive.

Because it isn't about being loving or understanding - it is about us.

There is a time to speak and there is a time to keep your mouth shut.

Wisdom allows you to know which is which.



Naomi/Mara

The Book of Ruth is not actually so much about Ruth

but is framed by a story about a woman named Naomi.

which is framed by an even bigger story about who God is and how he works.

Her name means beautiful, attractive, charming, joyful

But what happened to her?

This is during one of the worst times of Israel's history - the horrific time of the Judges which we have already looked at.

Her husband and two sons flee famine. (v.1)

They flee to Moab - the land of their enemies. (v.2)

Moab & Ammon are the children of Lot, Abraham's Nephew, born of incest.

The are relatives of Israel.

So they are immigrants, refugees.

Naomi's husband dies. (v.3)

Her sons marry Moabite women and it seems they are happy for about 10 years. (v.5)

But they have no children.

Then tragically, Naomi's sons die. (v.5)

Leaving her with her two daughters in law.

Women in those days, especially foreign ones had no protection without family.

There seems to be opportunity back in the region of Bethlehem in Israel so she thinks of returning. (v.6-7)

While they are on the road, Naomi sends her daughters in law back to their families. (v.8-9)

But here is something of note: Their relationship is strong and the daughters don't want to leave her. (v.10)

Again Naomi persuades them to go home where there is hope for happiness. (v.12-13)

She goes as far as to say that God has turned against her. (v.13)

Orpah reluctantly agrees to return home. (v.14)

But for whatever reason, Ruth stays with Naomi. (v.15-16)

There is something about Ruth's bond with Naomi where she throws her faith in with this woman.

Try as she might, Naomi cannot persuade her to leave.

So they head into Bethlehem together.

The people of Bethlehem remember Naomi. (v.19)

She tells them two things: (v.20-21)

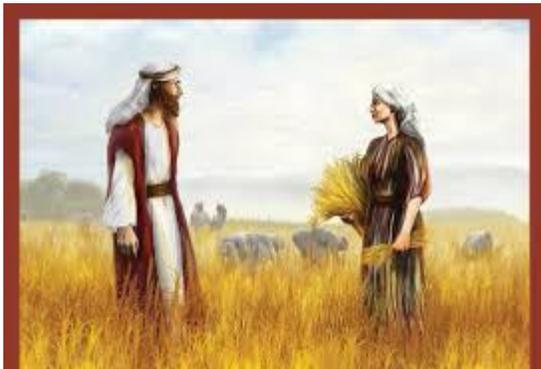
1. To call her "Mara" which means bitterness.

2. That God is against her and caused all her suffering.

It is the time of harvest and this is where the story begins. (v.22)

Sharing:

Tell of a time when you felt strong feelings of sadness, grief, despair, or abandoned.



Ruth & Boaz

This is what the Book of Ruth is all about.

Ruth, the Moabitess will meet one of the few faithful men of Israel named Boaz

who also happens to be someone who can redeem their name.

Naomi recognizes both his position and good character and encourages Ruth to take this risk.

So Ruth will take the risk offer herself to him and instead of taking advantage of her, he will honour her.

Boaz marries a foreign woman who was once married already.

They have a son named Obed.

And Mara is able to become Naomi again.

Ruth Chapter 4

¹³ So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When he made love to her, the LORD enabled her to conceive, and she gave birth to a son. ¹⁴ The women said to Naomi: "Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a guardian-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel!" ¹⁵ He will renew

your life and sustain you in your old age. For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons, has given him birth."

¹⁶ Then Naomi took the child in her arms and cared for him. ¹⁷ The women living there said, "Naomi has a son!" And they named him Obed. He was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

2 Things to Notice:

1. Although Naomi calls herself Mara, the Bible never uses the term for her at all.

It only calls her Naomi "Beautiful" not "Bitter."

2. The Subtlety of God

One of the theological notes and a concern to some scholars is that

God is silent in the book of Ruth.

I think actually, this is one of the most wondrous things about the book.

In Naomi's bitterness, even when she accuses him as the one who turns against her,

God is silent.

He doesn't lecture her or berate her.

But make no mistake, he is all over this book.

He is present in every scene but does not need to speak.

We have a lot to learn from God in this manner about caring for those who are in pain.

Practical Applications

Wisdom means being with those who do not feel well.

Mentally ill, physically ill,

Presence, acceptance, affection, service, silence, prayer.

Gestures and actions mean more than words.

Making it okay to be not okay.

[Sadness & Bing Bong Clip]



This is about not controlling others but trusting God.

Arminian & Calvinistic Controversy

Free Will vs. Sovereignty

Human Agency vs. Divine Will

We mistakenly see this as either/or rather than both/and

There is a mystery here in regard to the human relationship with God.

It is not all about us where we don't need God because we do.

"As long as we think we can save ourselves by our own willpower,

we will only make the evil in us stronger than ever."

- Heini Arnold

At the same time there is something in us that reaches out towards God.

As John of the Cross expressed it, *Solo la sed nos alumbra.*

We have "Only thirst to lead the way."

Our assent, by will, by body, by mind, by spirit engages with the power of God, the Holy Spirit. If anything, Our church is the place it is okay to confess the uncomfortable truth about yourself. Not so we can wallow in it or elicit sympathy, but so we can be vulnerable. In becoming vulnerable, in showing our wounds, we learn to be tender to others, truly loving. And God heals us. This is the place of patience, compassion, understanding and forgiveness.



Finding Naomi

You see, this bitter woman in pain who once blamed God,
is seen in the last scene cuddling a little Obed,
and she is laughing, filled with joy.

Mara is Naomi again.

And this little baby, becomes the father of Jesse, the Father of King David,
from whose line comes the lamb of God - Jesus.

He is a man of sorrows and he is a man of joy.