

Naomi goes home



Colour me!



Ruth 1:1-18

Before Israel was ruled by kings, Elimelech from the tribe of Ephrath lived in the town of Bethlehem. His wife was named Naomi, and their two sons were Mahlon and Chilion. But when their crops failed, they moved to the country of Moab. And while they were there, Elimelech died, leaving Naomi with only her two sons. Later, Naomi's sons married Moabite women. One was named Orpah and the other Ruth. About ten years later, Mahlon and Chilion also died. Now Naomi had no husband or sons.

When Naomi heard that the Lord had given his people a good harvest, she and her two daughters-in-law got ready to leave Moab and go to Judah. As they were on their way there, Naomi said to them, "Don't you want to go back home to your own mothers? You were kind to my husband and sons, and you have always been kind to me. I pray that the Lord will be just as kind to you. May he give each of you another husband and a home of your own."

Naomi kissed them. They cried and said, "We want to go with you and live among your people." But she replied, "My daughters, why don't you return home? What good will it do you to go with me? ..."

They cried again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth held on to her. Naomi then said to Ruth, "Look, your sister-in-law is going back to her people and to her gods! Why don't you go with her?"

Ruth answered, "Please don't tell me to leave you and return home! I will go where you go, I will live where you live; your people will be my people, your God will be my God. I will die where you die and be buried beside you. May the Lord punish me if we are ever separated, even by death!" When Naomi saw that Ruth had made up her mind to go with her, she stopped urging her to go back.

Commentary

This story of one Israelite family gives us a glimpse of what life was like during the time of the judges. Crops failed: families had to become migrants looking for food and work, there was intermarriage between cultures, and some people died very young. Naomi's family experienced all this, and when we meet her in the story, she is a widow with her two daughters-in-law from another country. News of the good harvest in Bethlehem provides her with an opportunity to return to her home town, but she doesn't expect Ruth and Orpah to come with her. Clearly these two women are loyal to her, but no one would blame them for staying in their own country of Moab.

However, Ruth refuses to leave her elderly mother-in-law, even though she herself will become a stranger in a foreign land. Ruth's devotion and love are remarkable, and the Bible includes this story to remind both its first readers and us today that God is at work in the most unexpected people and places.

Questions

- ▶ Can you imagine what it must be like to be forced to leave your home and live in a country far away?
- ▶ Naomi had experienced tragedy in her life. What could you say or do for someone you met who was hurting like this?
- ▶ Orpah and Ruth would have had to give up a lot to stay with Naomi. What arguments for and against going with Naomi can you find?
- ▶ Who inspires you today by the way in which they are living their life?



Visual aid

People often wear a black armband when they are in mourning for someone who has died. Why do you think people choose this colour for mourning?



Activity idea

This is a story of loss. Collect together some different pieces of dark material from which you can create a collage of sadness or weave together a cord of unhappiness. Now choose one bright piece of material or wool to add to what you have created, as a symbol of the help that Ruth brought to Naomi. This is also a picture of how we might brighten the lives of others who are facing unhappiness.



Prayer idea

On some paper plates, draw a face, with eyes in the centre, a straight line for the nose and a downturned curve for a sad mouth. Talk about those you know who are sad today and pray for them. Now turn the plates around and rework the picture to make a happy smiling face, making the sad mouth into a hairline and adding a smile. Ask God to help you to be someone who brings comfort and help to people, just like Ruth did.

Key verse

I will go where you go, I will live where you live; your people will be my people, your God will be my God (Ruth 1:16).

New Testament story link

Matthew 15:21-28: Jesus is surprised by the faith of a woman who comes from another country.



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