

## Faithful Women

Ruth ch 1 verses 6-13, 16-19

When I read the book of Ruth in the OT it makes me think of relationships past and present.

Last week Peter spoke to us about friendship with people and Jesus. We sang the old favourite hymn '*What a friend we have in Jesus*'.

Being faithful is part of friendship as is loyalty and commitment. I am not sure 'Facebook' friendship counts but perhaps that is a generational issue.

I have recently been with 10 nursing friends to celebrate 55 years since we met in pre nurse training school when we were 18 (going on 12). 20 of us are still in touch. Why have we remained faithful friends? Well, we worked and holidayed together, cried and laughed, cared about each other and supported each other in good and bad times. Thus we bonded.

So how do Naomi and Ruth build their faithfulness to each other and God? Do read the whole of Ruth, a short book, but good. A book of drama, courage and a conclusion in the New Testament.

The story starts with emigration, fleeing from famine. Israel was an unhappy land where God's people had forgotten him again. Naomi's husband Elimelech had the courage to take his wife and two sons to the East, over the Jordan to the country of Moab, Israel's enemies. A huge risk that pays off as both his sons meet and marry Moab women.

We still hear today of the movement of people driven by the need to find food, safety and work away from lands of war, violence and injustice.

However, disaster overcomes this family as the 3 men die leaving the women as widows. This is disastrous as widows without male support will be shunned, sink into poverty and left to beg for survival.

Naomi and Ruth share a deep sorrow in bereavement. Although their culture, background and ages are different this sorrow is a bond. Naomi was prepared to let the two younger women stay in Moab to find a new husband and future, a truly selfless act as she was very alone.

Ruth was having none of it

King James Bible version; 'Ruth said, Whither thou goest, I will go.

Whither thou lodgest I will lodge.

Thy people will be my people

And thy God my God.

Where thou diest will I die

And, there will I be buried. '

Ch 1 verse 16

That is strong, wow. Naomi means so much to Ruth. Also, Ruth's love of God; What a wonderful example to us. Naomi must have shown God to Ruth through her way of life, her belief and faith and taught Ruth about God's love. Ruth had grown so much in faith that she uttered those wonderful words 'Your God will be my God'. Yet she came from Moab where idols were worshipped.

This is a huge reward to Naomi. We see God's living presence in a relationship overcomes differences.

I visited St Ann's church recently, in Israel near the pool of Bethesda. In the church is a statue of St Ann with Mary (mother of Jesus) as a child, standing at her mother's knee. St Ann is holding the scripture and reading to Mary. These women, Naomi and Ann passed on their knowledge and love of God to the next generation. Are we doing the same?

Anyway, back to Bethlehem go Naomi and Ruth. Do read the rest of this story and hear how Ruth marries a relative of Naomi. So ensuring the future care of Naomi. Faithfulness and care for each other in every way.

Now I feel strongly that God uses every circumstance here to grow his Kingdom. Why – well both these women were not only faithful to each other but faithful and committed to God. God loved Ruth and we see no-one is disqualified from God's love because of race, background, or sex. Those who believe, God blesses. How was Ruth blessed? She was the great grandmother of King David and therefore an ancestor of Jesus.

Jesus, a Jew came to show how God loves all his people. The Good News, the Gospel, is for all to hear and believe.  
But we have to tell it.

I hope and pray my faith in God will encourage and strengthen me daily to live his way and spread his word, the Good News.