

Dear Friends,

RUTH 1: 15-17

We have arrived at the most celebrated moment in the book of Ruth. Three widows are travelling together. Naomi is going towards her home in Bethlehem. With her are her daughters-in-law. They are going away from their home in Moab. Naomi has told them to "Go back". After some persuading Orpah has returned. But Ruth is still clinging to her mother-in-law.

Naomi tries one last time. She says, "Look, Orpah has gone back to her people and gods, return after her". The custom was that Daughters-in-law were meant to honour their mothers-in-law. Orpah has behaved properly in obeying Naomi. Ruth should be less defiant and rebellious and more like her.

Ruth however stands her ground. She speaks some of the most beautiful words of love and commitment in the Bible.

"Wherever you go, I will go;  
where you lodge, I will lodge;  
your people shall be my people,  
and your God my God.  
Where you die, I will die-  
There will I be buried."

The word translated "lodge" is the word used for an overnight shelter, one that is used when people are travelling or wandering. Ruth has no illusions about being able to live a settled life. Their poverty will mean living with permanent insecurity.

Ruth abandons everything so as not to abandon Naomi. She chooses insecurity over security; the unfamiliar over the familiar. In a man's world, she chooses to throw in her lot with a woman. In not exactly a young person's world, but certainly not an old person's world, she chooses to throw in her lot with an old person. She chooses this for the rest of her life. If Ruth is to be buried with Naomi, it means that she will never go home to Moab. What she does is against custom and common sense.

The name Ruth may mean "well-watered" or "fertile"; or "a sight" as in something beautiful to behold; or it can mean "friend". Ruth is without doubt a model of friendship. Perhaps the most beautiful sight is human friendship. It is fertile and produces a fruitful harvest.

Abraham is rightly honoured for leaving everything behind and stepping out into an uncertain future without knowing exactly where he is going. God, however promises him land and descendants. He goes with family and many possessions. By contrast Ruth does not have the reassurance of a call and promises from God. She has no hope for the future. All she has is her kindness and friendship towards a woman with whom she can expect nothing.

Let's hope that things turn out well for Ruth, that Naomi will be kind to her, that God will show her the sort of kindness that she herself has shown.

God bless you,

Tony