

Dear Friends,

## RUTH 2: 2

Last time we concentrated on Naomi and how she felt as she returned to Bethlehem. She let everyone know how God had made her life bitter. She seems to think that her suffering has been greater than that endured by others. Earlier she said to her daughters-in-law "It has been far more bitter for me than for you." We can understand. Her husband and both of her sons have died. She has reason to complain.

But how about Ruth? How might Ruth be feeling? She has left her home and family to come to somewhere new. She has pledged her life to Naomi. And Naomi seems to have shown no appreciation. Rather she appears to have stopped talking to Ruth. Then, when they do arrive in Bethlehem, Naomi does not even acknowledge her. She says, "I went away full but the Lord has brought me back empty." Might Ruth be thinking, "Heh! You are not empty. You've got me"? Might she be feeling a little bewildered and frightened and be wondering if she's really made the right decision?

If Ruth did feel this way, she did not have time to dwell on it. She and Naomi need to eat. Ruth quickly realises that she is the one who is going to have to put food on the table. Throughout the story, she shows herself to be resourceful, intelligent and ready to take the initiative. She does not do what others tell her to do. She makes plans, carries them out and gets things done. Today we would describe her as having agency. She is a good role model for us.

So, Ruth says to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone in whose sight I may find favour." The right of people to glean is set out in the Hebrew Scriptures. It says, "When you reap your land's harvest, you shall not finish off the edge of your field, nor pick up the gleanings of your harvest. And your vineyard you shall not pluck bear, nor pick up the fallen fruit of your vineyard. For the poor and for the alien you shall leave them." That is, the harvest is a blessing from God. Don't take every last bit for yourself. Don't harvest right to the edge. Leave some for those who are in need. If the harvesters drop some along the way, then leave it. Don't pick up the bits that get left behind. Leave them for the people who get left behind. The principle is, do what you can to share all the resources. Make sure everyone has enough. It's not good for some to have too little. It's not good for some to have too much either.

In response to Ruth's request to go gleaning, Naomi says what is in Hebrew just a couple of words, "Go, my daughter." These are the first words we've heard her speak to Ruth since Ruth's great declaration of friendship. They are still pretty brief. She expresses no concern about the risks that Ruth may be taking, which we learn are very real. I wonder if it's a little more evidence of Naomi's depression. She can't rouse herself to say very much at all. And what she does say is quite similar to what she kept repeating on the journey to Bethlehem. There she said, "Go, return," now again she says "Go." But this time at least there is tenderness. She calls her

“My daughter.” Maybe she’s just hungry, tired and worn out after the journey. If Ruth was able to bring home some food, perhaps that would restore her soul and bring her back to life again.

God bless you,

Tony