

Ruth Tells Her Story

Ruth 1-4 by Patty Friesen (October 31/21)

My name is Ruth. I grew up in the land of Moab. Back in the days of the Judges, there was drought and famine in Palestine and a Hebrew family moved from Bethlehem into our area. There was a father Elimelech, a mother Naomi and they had two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. They bought land and began farming and learned our language but Elimelech died suddenly and Naomi was left as a single mother to care for her two sons. She was tough as nails and worked the land for food with her two sons. She never remarried and stayed in Moab for 10 years and the boys grew up. Naomi didn't plan to go back to her people. The boys were acculturated and Mahlon married my friend Orpah but I thought Chilion was more handsome so I married him.

We all lived on the same farmyard. Naomi wasn't bad as mother-in-laws go. She had taught us a few words of Hebrew and told us bible stories about Job and Sarah and Abraham and Sarah and about her God - El Shaddai, which is a feminine name in Hebrew - the highest God of the Mountains who was also compassionate. But suddenly Mahlon and Chilion died also of the same genetic disease, leaving Naomi, Orpah and I childless and landless since the land did not pass to widows. We were like Job who lost everything in one day.

Naomi took a deep breath and decided it was time to move back to her people in Bethlehem where her in-laws had land and daughters could inherit land like Job's daughters. She had heard the rains had come again to Palestine and the fields were productive and she was determined to find land. We said we'd go with her and take

care of her in her old age. She was pleasant most of the time but all her losses broke something in her faith and she became bitter.

So off we went walking down the road to Bethlehem, we three sad women, Orpah, Naomi and I. Orpah was already homesick and bawling before we had even left town! Naomi's steps slowed down as she reconsidered. She stopped and told us to go back to our mother's houses and remarry - that there was no future for us with her in Bethlehem even if she would find another husband and have more sons to inherit land - would we wait for them to grow up? It did sound like a ridiculous scheme after all and Orpah looked sad and kissed Naomi good-bye and I but I could tell she was happy to go back home. I didn't have a home to go back to so I clung to Naomi. She said, "see your sister-in-law has returned to her home and her gods." I said, "Don't make me go back. Where you go, I will go. Where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people will be my people. Your God, my God..Where you die, I will die and there I will be buried. We will not be parted, even in death."

Naomi didn't have anything to say after that so we walked on. It was an arduous journey and we looked a wreck. After days and days, we finally came upon lush fields of barley turning golden and by evening walked into the little town of Bethlehem, lying still, above the deep and dreamless sleep, the silent stars going by. We stayed with relatives and by morning, everyone heard we had arrived and came to greet us and were shocked and didn't recognize Naomi saying, "Is this Naomi?" She retorted, "Don't call me Naomi which means Pleasant, call me Mara which means Bitter for Shaddai - the compassionate God of the mountains has dealt bitterly with me. I went away full

and have come back empty. Why call me Pleasant when the God of Compassion has brought calamity on me?"

It was difficult adjusting to life in Bethlehem, living with my in-law who was living with her in-laws! Naomi/Mara was depressed and I didn't know the language and we couldn't live off of Naomi's in-laws forever. Now Naomi had a kinsman on her husband's side, a prominent rich man, whose name was Boaz. I said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the barley." She said, "Go, my daughter." We were like blood relatives now. We only had each other. So I found a field gleaned in the field, picking up barley left behind by the reapers. Naomi said the harvesters were commanded in Hebrew scripture to leave grain behind for widows and orphans and foreigners and we were all three.

As it happened, I came to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who just then came from Bethlehem. He was an older farmer but he was still handsome. He said to the reapers, "Shaddai be with you." They answered, "Shaddai bless you." Then he said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, "To whom does this young woman belong?" The servant answered, "She is the Moabite who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab. She wanted to glean, and she has been on her feet from early this morning until now, without resting even for a moment."

Then Boaz came over to me and said "Now listen, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my gleaners. No one will dare bother you. If you get thirsty, go to the vessels and drink. I was so tired and relieved I fell face to the ground, and said to him, "Why have I found favour in your sight, that you should take notice of me, when I am a foreigner?" But Boaz answered, "All that you have done for

your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. May Shaddai reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from Shaddai, under whose wings you have come for refuge!" Then she said, "May I continue to find favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, even though I am not one of your servants."

At mealtime Boaz said to me, "Come here, and eat some of this bread, and dip your morsel in the wine." So I sat beside the reapers, and he heaped up some parched grain. I ate until she was full, and had some left over to take home for Naomi. When I got up to glean, I overheard Boaz instructing his young men, "Let her glean even among the standing sheaves, and do not reproach her. You must also pull out some handfuls for her from the bundles, and leave them for her to glean, and do not rebuke her."

So I gleaned in the field until evening. Then I beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about a bushel of barley. I picked it up and came into the town, and Naomi saw how much I had gleaned and I gave her what was left over from lunch. She was impressed and asked, "Where did you glean today? And where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you." I told her it was Boaz and she told me to stick with him since he was a relative and I told her I could stay with them until the end of the barley and wheat harvest so I did.

Boaz and I became quite comfortable with each other but I knew he was out of my league but Naomi concocted a plan for us to ask him to marry us. I say us because Naomi said it was also in her best interest if I married well and could inherit land. She said Boaz was busy winnowing barley, separating the grain from the stock in the

threshing building and that I should go visit him when he had eaten and drank wine and was in a good mood and ask him to marry us. So I went, I watched him finish his supper and wine but I didn't get to talk to him because he leaned back and fell right asleep. This was a fine kettle of fish and I knew I couldn't go home to Naomi without a marriage proposal so I laid down too in the hay and waited for him to wake up. He snored like an ox and woke up with a snort around midnight calling, "Whose there?"

I told him it was I Ruth and that he should marry me because the Hebrew law required relatives to marry and care for widows. Well, he was shocked and delighted by that but said there was a relative more closely related who should marry me but he would make sure he wasn't a contender. He sent me home with a lot of barley and I knew he would be a good provider and would treat me respectfully as he had always done. Naomi was delighted by the news and Boaz sorted it all out and we got married and had a son named Obed who became the grandfather of King David which is how I, Ruth, a widow and a foreigner got my name in the genealogy of the royal family of Israel and eventually of the Messiah himself who was born in our hometown of Bethlehem.

Shaddai gave to us and took away from us and gave to us again. We don't understand these ways but as long as we live we try to trust Shaddai in good times and in bad, in rain and in drought, in feasting and in famine, in sickness and in health.

It's quite a story and the best one in the Bible I think. Thanks for listening.