

Hints and Rumours of God: Ruth 1.6-18

Today's TFTD is from Linda:

"Do not press me to leave you or to turn back from following you! Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God" (1:16). Here we have the story of two strong women who are on a steep learning-curve. Naomi is going to have to learn to rely on Ruth, and Ruth, for her part, will have to learn to rely on the kindness of strangers.

It has been suggested that the central themes running through the Book of Ruth are: emptiness turning to fullness, famine turning to abundant food, loss turning to love, bitterness turning to joy, barrenness giving way to birth. And the improbable catalyst for all this is Ruth, who is neither a king nor prophet, but a mere widow and a foreigner. She's the outsider looking to secure a future for herself and Naomi – it all sounds too familiar still today. Perhaps this short book will prompt us think compassionately about how we see the 'otherness' of traumatized migrants arriving on our shores.

Today's passage picks up where yesterday's left off; it began with famine in the land and three bereft widows. *"Then [Naomi] started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD had consideration for his people and given them food"* (Ruth 1:6).

"She had heard" – for me this village gossip seems pretty scant evidence on which to set out on a dangerous journey with an uncertain end? I think we all would need a good deal more information which we're simply not given – it's not forthcoming. From whom had she heard? How? When? Where? If God really wanted her back in Bethlehem, then why didn't God give her a clearer sign, or send an angel, or appear in a burning bush, or a blinding light? We can be left wondering if God is doing anything at all in this story? It seems a bit smoke and mirrors, when what we want, expect, is the strong guiding hand of the Divine.

Up to now things look pretty grim - so uncertain. But Naomi hears a rumour: "*that the LORD had consideration for his people and given them food*" (1.6) and so she steps forward in faith. That's probably as good as it gets. A simple village story, but it is going somewhere surprising, because God is always going somewhere surprising and he's trying to take the main characters with Him.

This is a story where God is seldom talked about, doesn't intervene and who never seems to emerge from behind the scene. But isn't that the way God works in our lives? Rumours of God, witnesses who claim God is up to something; faithful believers who can sometimes open our eyes to the presence of God in our midst.

There is no full-blown "revelation" or "Thus says the Lord" announcements in this book, none of those things we look for to give us some measure of certainty and assurance. All we are offered is a Moabite widow risking her reputation to find a new life for herself and her mother-in-law Naomi. It's little wonder that we are left asking again, "Where is God in this story?"

And yet we are given hints and rumours of God. It was everyday life in Moab when Naomi heard rumours of food in Bethlehem, whose very name means "House of bread." Like Naomi, we are invited to follow where the story leads us; to listen to the rumours that God is up to something; to step out even when the map ends before we know where it is taking us. It's called faith.

God does eventually bring Ruth to be honoured guest at the barley harvest: her emptiness turned to fullness, her famine to abundant food, loss has found love again, bitterness turned to joy, and barrenness has given way to new life.

Every blessing Linda