

Trusting in God to work through others: Ruth 3.16-18

Today's TFTD is from Robin:

I have been asked to reflect on what really looks like the fag end of a chapter; words that appear to add nothing to structure of the story of Ruth and Boaz. Our short passage today ends with the following advice that Naomi gives to Ruth,

*'Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out,
for the man will not rest, but will settle the matter today.'* (Ruth 3:18)

Others have reflected on what went on before; Ruth's loyalty to Naomi and the kindness that Boaz showed to Ruth. Others will be reflecting on what comes next; the way in which Boaz interprets the law in such a way to settle the matter and take Ruth as his wife.

Today we reflect on the words of Naomi urging Ruth to be patient and trust Boaz to work out what has to be done. And as we do so we remember all the times when we have been patient and trusted somebody else to do the right thing; interpreting our faith tradition in the right way.

Twelve years ago a 15-year old failed asylum seeker came to stay in my house. As my family learned more and more about his case, we resolved to start a campaign to persuade the Home Office to change their mind about him. In the end we were successful and our foster son (as we often refer to him) became a UK citizen.

As part of the campaign I approached local churches where we then lived, including the Anglican parish church. I explained the story to the vicar and asked if I could speak to the congregation and ask them to send a postcard to the Home Office on our behalf. He said he would have to speak to the Diocese to find out what he should do.

A while later he called me back and said that the Diocese had told him that on no account was he to get himself involved in 'anything political'. And then he said: 'And how am I to interpret this advice?' In the end about 10 postcards were signed by members of that congregation and I became a member of it myself. It was a turning point in my life. It began with me trusting somebody else to do the right thing.

I later understood this to be the act of trusting God to guide another person in the ways of justice and of peace. Boaz was explicit to Ruth in their earlier conversations that he accepted the guidance of God. Naomi understood this and had faith in this process.

Augustine Tanner-Ihm is an African American man who has just completed ordination training in the Church of England. This summer he has been applying for curacies around the country. One parish wrote back to him to tell him that because their parish was 'monochrome white working class' they felt he would 'feel uncomfortable' serving a curacy with them. This happened the same week that a group of monochrome white Church of England bishops 'took the knee' to show that 'Black Lives Matter'.

So, Augustine chose to go public with his rejection letter. In doing so he has done the Church of England a great service because he has highlighted that we still have a way to go before black lives actually do matter in the Church of England. But by going public he has exposed a group of Bishops to the accusation of hypocrisy and this has not helped his search for a curacy. He is searching still and most dioceses, including ours, have long since allocated all the curacies they can afford to fund to ordinands they have known about for a while.

And so Augustine, like Ruth, is left waiting, hoping that one of the nice people who have been praying for him will be able to work out a way to 'settle the matter'. Like Ruth, Augustine knows he is a foreigner, an outsider and he will be wondering, especially in the light of his rejection letter, whether this is the reason that he has been asked to wait and trust in others.

Boaz steered a path through the traditions of his culture to find a place for Ruth so that she could take her place among the people of God. Twelve years ago, a parish priest steered a way through the thinking of the Church of England to find a place for me among the people of God. Who is the Boaz figure who will do the same for our friend Augustine? Augustine is waiting. His friends are counselling him to be patient and to trust in God.