

A very strong-minded person



Today's reflection on Ruth comes from Martha Curry, Liz Shercliff's seven-year-old grand-daughter. I am very grateful to Martha for allowing me to share her story with you. The picture is Martha's too. Apologies by the way that yesterday's picture didn't get through. I can send it direct to you if you email me.

Ruth was born in a country called Moab. When she grew up she married a boy called Mahlon. Mahlon was not from Moab, he didn't look the same and he didn't believe the same as his neighbours, but Ruth saw past that to the person he really was. That's the first thing to remember about Ruth – she could see things as they really are. Sadly, Mahlon died young. His dad his brother died too, and that left Ruth with mother-in-law called Naomi and a sister-in-law called Orpah.

Being a girl was difficult in those days, nobody thought they should be taken notice of, or be able to work so that they could afford to live. Naomi decided to go back to her home country and village, called Bethlehem. "You don't need to come with me," she said to Ruth and Orpah. "I know what it's like to be a foreigner and a woman. You stay here. At least this is your home country."

Orpah could see the sense in what Naomi said. She went a little way with the other two, but then turned for home. Ruth thought about what Naomi had said. But she knew that

when you got married in those days you became part of a new family, and she wanted to be loyal to Naomi, the only member of her new family who was left. She also thought that Naomi's God was different from the one she and her neighbours worshiped. The god of Moab was called Chemosh, which meant 'destroyer'. People lived in fear of that god. But Naomi's God was different. Her God didn't want to destroy or control people. Her God wanted a relationship with them. Her God has agreed a promise with them, and had set them free when they were slaves in Egypt, a long time ago.

Ruth had a choice. She could stay in her own country, but with a god who wanted to destroy people, or she could go with Naomi to a place where people knew a God who seemed to care. Whatever she did, she would be a girl and so not worth very much to anyone.

Ruth decided to go to Bethlehem with Naomi, and even said to her mother-in-law that she would follow her God. That's another thing about Ruth – she was willing to take a risk.

Fortunately, Ruth and Naomi got to Bethlehem at harvest time, when everyone was busy collecting wheat to see them through the winter. The farmers who did what God said didn't let their workers collect every last bit of wheat. Instead they told them to leave some for the hungry who were allowed to collect the crop behind them. Ruth and Naomi were poor and so Ruth went out and followed the workers in a field nearby, collecting food for her and Naomi as she went. Ruth wasn't afraid of hard work!

Even in Bethlehem women and girls weren't allowed to own things or work for money. The only way of being looked after was to get married. Well, it turned out that the owner of the field Ruth had been working in was a kind man. He followed God quite carefully. And he *wasn't* married. He was also quite good looking, which helped!

Naomi hatched a plan. She could see that not only would Ruth be better off if she married this man, but so would she.

At the end of harvest, just like there is in lots of places today, there was a big party. Naomi told Ruth to get dressed nicely and put on her best perfume. Because Ruth quite liked the man, Boaz was his name, she did as Naomi said. "Sneak into bed with him" Naomi advised, so Ruth did. Boaz had had quite a lot to eat and drink and was fast

asleep. When he woke suddenly to find Ruth with him, he was a bit shocked. He also knew that Ruth would be called all sorts of names if anyone found out what had happened. He sent her away but told her he would sort everything out.

Ruth had risked being called names and being treated as a bad person in the hope of making things better for herself and Naomi. And her risk was worth it. Next day Boaz went to see his relatives, who could have stopped him marrying Ruth, and the leaders of the village. He promised that she would become his wife. And she did.

Ruth was a very strong-minded person. She made what she thought were the right decisions, and she took risks. She went to live in Bethlehem even though she would be a foreigner there. She went with Naomi even though she didn't have to. And she risked her good name to win a bigger prize.

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