

## **THE STORY OF RUTH**

*The Book of Ruth, specially 1:19 & 22; 2:8, 11-12 & 19-20; 3:10; 4:13 & 17ff.*

### **Ruth – an economic refugee**

The story of Ruth is about love and solidarity between two women of different ages. One of them (Ruth) is an immigrant who has let herself be pulled up by the roots from her own culture in order to accompany her new family, her mother-in-law, when life gets difficult. They are both poor, homeless and without a family. Their staple food is a product of the grain harvest, and the thought of grain conjures up thoughts of hunger and drought and the toil and moil of providing daily bread.

The story is to be found in the Book of Ruth in the Old Testament. It is best to read all four chapters, but here is a synopsis of the events as Ruth may have experienced them:

"There was a famine in the country where Bethlehem lies, so my parents-in-law left their home and their fields and went to a neighbouring country to find work. I, Ruth, a Moabite from that country, married one of their sons. Unfortunately, my husband died while we were still childless. His brother and father died too, so only my mother-in-law Naomi and I were left. She decided to return to her home country, and I insisted on going with her. –Not without protests from Naomi, because she thought that a young immigrant widow wouldn't have a future in her country. But I said: You won't persuade me to leave you. For where you go, I will go; and where you live, I will live. Your people are my people, and your God is my God.

We came to Bethlehem during the barley harvest. I decided to do as other poor women do: go to rich men's fields and glean the grain that falls from the sheaves that are being tied up. I happened to glean in a field belonging to Boaz, a relative of my father-in-law. He was kind, and said that I should keep close to his own women, and even eat with them. I bowed before him and asked why he was so kind to me, a foreigner. Boaz replied that he had heard of my concern for my mother-in-law, and that I had left my father and mother and my own country in order to come to a people I didn't know. "God reward you for what you have done", he said.

When I came home in the evening, Naomi was overwhelmed over how much I had gleaned, and when she heard that I had been in Boaz' fields, she exclaimed, "May he be blessed by God, who does not forsake the living or the dead."

Naomi was concerned that I shouldn't remain unmarried, and she thought that Boaz could be a good husband for me, even though he was much older. She told me what to do to make him take more notice of me and dare to propose to me. And I did what she suggested: I washed, put on my best clothes, anointed myself with fragrant oils and sneaked into his tent while he was asleep. I lay down at his feet. He was surprised when he woke up and saw me there, but when he found out who I was, he said, "God bless you, my daughter. You have shown even greater faithfulness by not running after young men, neither rich nor poor." After a while, Boaz bought the fields that had belonged to my in-laws. They had lain fallow since Naomi and her family had left for my country, the land of Moab. He married me, and we had a son, Obed. Naomi lived with us and was the boy's foster mother.

Time has passed, and now I am grandmother to Jesse and great grandmother to David! Strange how life works out. "The Lord moves in a mysterious way!"

*Discuss:*

- Try to describe the woman Ruth. Who was she? Why did she act the way she did?
- What do you think of Ruth's decision to leave her own country? What was it that made her go with Naomi to Bethlehem?
- There can be no doubt that Ruth was a brave woman. But Boaz was an equally brave man. He could easily have been criticised for doing so much for an immigrant woman – and he even married her! What can we learn from him?  
What did he do that can be an example for us when we meet immigrants?
- The Book of Ruth is different from most of the other books in the Bible. Down the years, many people have wondered why a story like this should be included in the Bible. What do you think is the reason?

## **STORIES FROM NORWAY**

### **MEET A WOMAN FROM KOSOVO, 17 YEARS OLD**

We came to Norway because there was a war at home, and everything was uncertain.

All my relations had left the country. I was 13 years old when we came here. To begin with, we lived at an asylum reception centre. I wanted to learn Norwegian quickly, so I was allowed to work as an assistant in the reception centre day nursery. After we had lived for two years at the centre, we received word that we could stay in Norway. But the uncertainty during the two years was terrible. Would the police come and fetch us? I am the youngest of 8 – it's important to be a big family. I always have someone to support me. It's good to have a big family in a crisis. Now, six years later, I feel more Norwegian than Albanian.

My parents will always feel they are Albanian. But all my life and my future will be here in Norway. I only want to go back as a visitor. I have never thought of myself as a refugee. I work, I go to school, I have a family. My parents want me to marry someone from Kosovo, but I would rather marry a Norwegian. When I think of people in Kosovo, and what kind of life they live, I don't feel homesick. They don't go to school, there isn't much work and they don't have enough money for food. It's nice and safe to live here in Norway. My dream is to run my own restaurant when I grow up.

### **MEET A WOMAN FROM SOMALIA, 22 YEARS OLD**

I came to Norway about five years ago. I'm already divorced from my husband, who came here with me. That would never have happened in Somalia. To be a single mother is hard when you don't have relations or your mother nearby. Friendship among women is important in Somalia. Especially before and after childbirth. Nothing can replace that network. Not a health station nor a midwife. Do Norwegian women understand that? I was so lonely. I only had my husband, and he was just as much a stranger to our child as any other man would have been. There were no other Somali women in the vicinity, and I spoke very little Norwegian. I didn't dare to say anything, even though I had been on a Norwegian course. I was very isolated. My husband did the shopping, collected money from the social security

office and organised our everyday life. When we got divorced, I had to make my own decisions about the future for myself and our child. The most important thing was to build up a social network independent of my husband. I moved to a larger town and took active part in a women's group. Through the job centre I was given a placement, so that I could begin to think of supporting myself. But I miss having a family for my child. Aunts and uncles, cousins and grandparents. People who love my son as much as I do. I have friends, and the day nursery, but it's not the same. One of the worst things about coming to Norway was that I lost the social status I had had in Somalia. I came from a well-known family, a family that had been prominent in politics for generations... Everyone knew who I was, just by seeing my surname, and they treated me with great respect. In Norway I was reduced to being an immigrant with no social status. This was very difficult to deal with in the beginning, but it has taught me a lot. That people have the same worth whatever their social or economic background.

I hope I can have a good life in Norway. That my son will be able to go back to Somalia to meet his family. And I dream that we shall be treated as equals.