

Introduction to the Old Testament
Integrative Project

Ruth – Bible Study for Mother/Daughter Group

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Notes as to Use: First pass out “The Book of Ruth” sheet and discuss questions appropriately. Then pass out the second sheet/s with design on one side and explanations on the other, pass around crocheted symbol for Ruth.

The Book of Ruth

Discussion Questions:

What characteristics in this story jump out at you? What might you notice upon further reflection?

If you were to share this story -- re-record or re-tell this story somehow, how would you do it? To what depictions does this story lend itself for you?

Are there symbols within the text that you might use, or other symbols you would choose to represent aspects of the story? Which aspects?

Is this a personal story, or a public/common one? Why?

My Altar Linen – Symbol Chart (Filet Crochet)

Hearts In Corners: These hearts represent the love and devotion Ruth has for Naomi. They are in the corners because corners are the strongest parts of a structure, keeping the other parts together. This placement represents the strength Ruth had, drawn from this love and devotion, a love which brought her into a land unfamiliar to her and to God.

RUTH Bottom Border: The five continuous “Ruth’s” represent two things. First, they are joined together into a continuous line because Ruth was constant in her devotion. The repetition of five represent the five parallels Ruth gives when proclaiming her devotion to Naomi (1:16b-17a).

Where you go, I will go:

Where you lodge, I will lodge;

Your people shall be my people,

and your God my God.

Where you die, I will die...

That this sits at the “floor” of the deising represents Ruth’s laying at Boaz feet on the threshing floor. This bottom border also serves the practical purpose of identifying the story the cloth tells.

Teardrops: Naomi’s tears of bitterness (1:20-21), representative of Mahlon and Chilion. There are two teardrops rather than three (which would have included Elimelech, her husband) to differentiate these teardrops from Baptism/Trinity symbols, in hope of avoiding confusion.

Grain: The grain around the perimeter is meant to help illustrate the theme of grain running throughout this story, in both its presence and absence. Naomi came to Moab with her husband and sons because of a lack of grain/famine (1:1-3) and Ruth met Boaz through their need of grain and his abundance of it. It gives context to the setting of the story I would like to stress. The six individual grains in the middle signify the six measures of barley Boaz gave Ruth to bring to Naomi (3:15).

Wheat Stalks: Again, plays along my chosen theme of grain. Also, seems to be a common symbol for Ruth. The first stalk (upper left corner) stands for the famine and Naomi’s family in Moab. It is smaller and upside-down, signifying there is “something wrong” with the harvest – that there’s not much there! As to Naomi’s family in Moab, there are three marriages: Naomi/Elimelech, Mahlon/Ruth, and Chilion/Orpah; all of which are ultimately fruitless because they do not result in any surviving heir. These two ideas – famine and “fruitless unions” combine well because they both represent the absence of a need.

The second, dominant wheat stalk (right) is large and full, representative of the land of Bethlehem and family upon their return. The availability/abundance of food and the continuing of this family line.

Shepherd’s Staff: Represents David, the great-grandson of Ruth and Boaz. This symbol for David invokes the memory of David the shepherd boy rather than King David, great king of Israel. The bottom (right) end of this staff forms a cross with the bottom of the wheat stalk, for through Joseph Ruth and David are of the same family line. Representative of Ruth’s posterity in general. I placed the staff and wheat thus so because I wanted to form a cross, and while this may be more subtle (and the subtlety appropriate) I wanted to relate David to Jesus, but avoid the depiction of a “good shepherd” cross which would refer primarily to Jesus rather than David.

As to the function: I designed this to cover the host prior to Holy Communion specifically and perhaps a bread cloth in general as opposed to a wall-hanging or pillow. This again makes the connection to the grain and our need for it, but also draws the meaning out and back to Jesus, beyond the (important) family connection between Our Lord and Ruth. It serves to remind of the connection between bread and Jesus and the connection of Jesus as human, with a human body (bread) and a human family (Ruth). This grain, needed for life, as Jesus, the bread of life.

Small Ruth design: Grain forms a heart. Both represent the Ruth story and Ruth herself, the symbols are explained on the reverse of this sheet. A smaller, more “concise” symbol.