

Joel Richter – OT Project – Fall 2004

The Exile

*Wandering this cold, lonely place,
I do not understand,
And can barely see.
Darkness surrounds me,
I do not fit in,
And can only see pain.
I live in exile on earth.*

Community of Exiles

*Living in exile leads to deep loneliness,
And our only peace lies in God.
With God, we feel alive.
Through others, we see God in this place.
We have no place for our heads.*

Ode to Friendship

*Life in the moment leads to strange places.
Opening up my heart,
I discover the depths of true friendship.
Friends speak truth
And respect each other on all levels.
I am who I am.
A true friend accepts me for who I am.
Without friends,
I cannot experience the depths of love.*

Yearning

*Who is this woman?
So beautiful,
So strong,
She desires me.
I do not deserve her
I will join with my companion.
Love fills me,
God is here.*

Where is God?

*I do not see you.
I left with security and with love.
All around me,
I see death and destruction.
I hunger for pleasant times.
I hunger for vindication.*

*All I have is her.
What can she do for me?
She is useless but loves me deeply.
I do not deserve her.*

*She cares for me with a deep love inside of her.
I want her to be complete.
She will do anything for me.
So young and full of life,
I will help her.*

*She has dedicated it all to me.
I am full and honored.
Let the whole world see our beauty.
Blessed be the anointed one!
She has brought me favor.*

God is here in the love of a daughter.

Ruth

"Friend, Companion"

Theme: In grief and despair, God works in companions demonstrating love for us.

Exploring Ruth: The book of Ruth is a story of loyalty within a family structure. Ruth remains loyal to her mother-in-law, Naomi, during the death of her husband and sons. Upon returning to Israel, Boaz remains loyal to Ruth and Naomi allowing Ruth to glean his fields. Naomi coerces the situation to obtain Boaz as Ruth's husband remaining loyal to both of them. Amazingly, God works in these plans.

Naomi: Pleasant to bitter

1. *The exile* speaks of abandonment with *The community of exiles* speaking of comfort in others. How does this relate to the account of Naomi?
2. How does this relate to your relationships during times of sorrow and suffering?

Ruth: Friend, Companion

1. *Ode to Friendship* discusses dedication and loyalty. How does Ruth demonstrate her loyalties?
2. How does Ruth's friendship and loyalty pertain to daughter's relation to a mother or vice-versa? How does this affect your relationship with God?

Boaz: Strength of the Redeemer

1. *Yearning* explains a simple desire for companionship. How does this relate to Boaz's feelings towards Ruth and his actions to acquire her?
2. Does this narrative of Ruth and Boaz change any opinions on loyalty in a relationship? Why or Why not?

God: I don't see you

1. *Where is God?* refers to a question quite frequently asked during our troubles. I wrote the poem from Naomi's perspective. How does this reflect her part in the whole story of Ruth?
2. The final stanza states "God is here in the love of a daughter." Ruth and Naomi had a dynamic relationship. How does God work in their relationship? How will God work in your relationship?

Final Thought: God extends refuge for those who seek it.

Ruth

"Friend, Companion"

Theme: In grief and despair, God works in companions demonstrating love for us.

Exploring Ruth: The book of Ruth is a story of loyalty within a family structure. Ruth remains loyal to her mother-in-law, Naomi, during the death of her husband and sons. Upon returning to Israel, Boaz remains loyal to Ruth and Naomi allowing Ruth to glean his fields. Naomi coerces the situation to obtain Boaz as Ruth's husband remaining loyal to both of them. Amazingly, God works in these plans.

Goal of the Bible Study:

Reflect on the loyalty of the relationships in Ruth through the difficult times emphasizing the final thought of God's refuge for those who seek it.

Teaching technique:

Don't worry about using all the scripture references. The main focus needs to be on the descriptions of the scriptural account and focus on the opposing viewpoints of the group to challenge and to expand. Leave the study with a question.

Simple starter exercise:

(5-10 minutes)

Talk to another mother or daughter about their relationship. Ask what aspects of the relationship do you enjoy and what aspects of the relationship do you not enjoy?

Naomi: Pleasant to bitter

(10-20 minutes)

(Have an elder mother read *The exile* and *The community of exiles*)

The exile speaks of abandonment with *The community of exiles* speaking of comfort in others. How does this relate to the account of Naomi?

I. Ruth 1:11-13 NRSV

- a. "But Naomi said, "Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from marrying? No, my daughters it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the Lord has turned against me."

- i. Her explanation of bitterness relates to the inability to have a husband and loss of status in the society. She does not want this imparted on her childless daughter-in-laws. (Nielsen 47)
- ii. Reflects a sense of loneliness and lack of understanding from *The exile*.
- iii. Grief and Despair
 - 1. Emphasize dying due to a word variance on death or dying occurring 10 times in Ruth.
- iv. Reflects companionship and community from *The community of exiles*.
 - 1. Ruth and Orpah

II. Ruth 1:19-22 NRSV

- a. "So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them; and the women said, 'Is this Naomi?' She said to them, 'Call me no longer Naomi, call me Mara, for the almighty has dealt bitterly with me. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty; why call me Naomi when the Lord has dealt harshly with me, and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?' So Naomi returned together with Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, who came back with her from the country of Moab. They came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest."
 - i. Further embitterment resides in these comments Naomi comes home in shame with nothing. A sense of wondering about "Why God has done this action to her?" appears. She does not see Ruth as having worth.
 - ii. Embitterment of not fitting in from *The exile*.
 - 1. A return to Israel in emptiness.
 - 2. Blaming God for her loss of children and returning to the promise land without comfort. (Webb 41)
 - iii. Emphasize refuge in the promise land.
- b. No comfort in the community reflected in the ending of *The community of exiles*.

How does this relate to your relationships during times of sorrow and suffering?
(Open ended for discussion)

Ruth: Friend, Companion

(10-20 minutes)

(Have a youthful daughter read *Ode to Friendship*)

Ode to Friendship discusses dedication and loyalty. How does Ruth demonstrate her loyalties?

I. Ruth 1:16-18 NRSV

- a. "But Ruth said, '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. Where you die, I will die - there I will be buried. May the Lord do thus and so to me, and more as well, if even death parts me from you!' When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

- i. Ruth will not depart her mother. What is she turning back from? Is she returning to Moab or returning to ways without Judaism? She takes up a new God for her mother. Naomi does not refuse.
 - 1.
- ii. Mysterious journey as in the beginning of *Ode to Friendship*.
- iii. A sense of opening her heart to her mother-in-law referring to *Ode to Friendship*.

II. Ruth 2:11-13 NRSV

- a. "But Boaz answered her, 'All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. May the Lord reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!' Then she said, 'May I continue to find favor in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, even though I am not one of your servants.'"
 - i. Boaz praises Ruth for her loyalty and ability to sacrifice of herself and offers a prayer for the Lord to reward her and to protect her. Her response opens a new loyalty to Boaz for his kind words. She desires his continued favor. Does loyalty gain protection?
 - 1. Her love for Naomi gleaning the fields as a poor widow. The word "glean" occurs 12 times in Chapter.
 - 2. Emphasize service to Naomi.
 - ii. Relating to *Ode to Friendship*, Boaz praises her dedication and respect for Naomi. He also speaks truth about Ruth.
 - iii. Ruth humbles herself before Boaz and respects him. A new friendship begins opening up service and love as in *Ode to Friendship*.

How does Ruth's friendship and loyalty pertain to daughter's relation to a mother or vice-versa?
 How does this affect your relationship with God?
 (Open ended discussion)

Boaz: Strength of the Redeemer

(10-20 minutes)

(I read *Yearning*)

Yearning explains a simple desire for companionship. How does this relate to Boaz's feelings towards Ruth and his actions to acquire her?

I. Ruth 3:8-10 NRSV

- a. "At midnight the man was startled, and turned over, and there, lying at his feet was a woman. He said, 'Who are you?' and she answered, 'I am Ruth, your servant; spread your cloak over your servant, for you are next-of-kin.' He said, 'May you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter; this last instance of your loyalty is better than the first; you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich.'"
 - 1.

- i. Boaz awakes startled with a woman at his feet. Feet in Hebraic thought referred to genitalia. Her acts were not innocent. She asked for marriage demonstrating boldness and strength. Is it ok to use these means? Is it bothering that the encouragement came from her mother? Boaz responds to her with praise and honor.
- ii. Strength from *Yearning* shows Ruth's loyal actions and Boaz desiring her.
- iii. Acquiring occurs with making her his wife. *Yearning* refers to companionship. In my opinion due to his previous lack of redemption, Boaz does not deserve her.

II. Ruth 4:9-10 NRSV

- a. "Then Boaz said to the elders and all the people, 'Today you are witnesses that I have acquired from the hand of Naomi all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon. I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, the wife of Mahlon, to be my wife, to maintain the dead man's name on his inheritance, in order that the name of the dead may not be cut off from his kindred and from the gate of his native place; today you are witnesses.'"
 - i. Boaz fulfills his promise. Prior to this a textual variance occurs. "You are also acquiring Ruth" may mean "I am acquiring Ruth." The difference changes the context of the situation of manipulation versus honesty. Ultimately he protects Ruth and redeems Naomi in my opinion honesty. How does his dedication inspire us?
 - ii. This combines with *Yearning* concerning the joining of companions. Boaz completes his promise.
 - iii. Love pours out from this declaration connecting to *Yearning*.

Does this narrative of Ruth and Boaz change any opinions on loyalty in a relationship? Why or Why not?

(Open ended discussion)

God: I don't see you

(10-20 minutes)

(Have the same elder mother read *Where is God?*)

Where is God? refers to a question quite frequently asked during our troubles. I wrote the poem from Naomi's perspective. How does this reflect her part in the whole story of Ruth?

- I. Already discussed Ruth 1:11-13 NRSV and Ruth 1:19-22 NRSV and reflects Stanzas 1 & 2.

II. Ruth 3:1-4 NRSV

- a. "Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, 'My daughter, I need to seek some security for you, so that it may be well with you. Now here is our kinsman Boaz, with whose young women you have been working. See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. Now wash and anoint yourself, and put on your best clothes and go down to the threshing floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has

finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, observe the place where he lies; then go and uncover his feet and lie down; and he will tell you what to do."

- i. Naomi lays out her master plan because of her daughter-in-laws love. Marriage seemed important for Naomi. How does this affect a mother's thoughts for her daughter? Understanding feet may mean genitalia, is the request strange? Can God work through this?
- ii. Reflect Naomi's desire to help in Stanza 3

III. Ruth 4:14-15 NRSV

- a. "Then the women said to Naomi, 'Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without next-of-kin; and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him.'"
 - i. These verses refer back to Naomi. She no longer can be bitter. Ruth worked for her mother-in-law and is worth more than sons. How can a mother show appreciation for her daughter?
 - ii. Reflect on the praise of Stanza 4; further explain the anointed one comment with Ruth anointing herself at her mother-in-laws commands.

The final stanza states "God is here in the love of a daughter." Ruth and Naomi had a dynamic relationship. How does God work in their relationship? How will God work in your relationship? (Emphasize the lack of Divine Manifestation. Otherwise leave for open-ended discussion.)

Final Thought: God extends refuge for those who seek it.