

Student Soul
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So as I was lying on my couch this afternoon, when for just two or three moments I had some peace, I was listening to Leona Lewis and watching out the window. The mist was slowly drifting past the house, there was grey in every direction, and I mused aloud, "I feel that, on an afternoon like this, something enchanted should happen."

I looked out the window and I wished something enchanted would happen. And I sort of longed for it. I wanted something that I didn't have words for to happen, and as I was trying to put words to that longing or desire, and I thought to myself, hang on. Something enchanted has happened!

And it made me realise how blind I had been not to notice that God's world which I have been living in today, has been crying out to me, and calling out to me that's something good is happening. I wondered how I'd forgotten that something has happened that has changed everything, and that is changing everything even as I lie here on the couch.

And I was thinking about tonight's scripture, Ruth chapter 1, and how it's an amazing story, an incredible beginning of a story. And I was reminded of a theologian from last century who issued a daring and bold invitation for us to enter into "the strange new world of the Bible."

And how so much of the enchanted-ness – and I mean that in the best possible sense of the word – of this world that is made and sustained by the breath, the Spirit of God seems closed off to us. We've forgotten how to see the mystery, the wonder, the beauty, the vitality and the vibrancy of this Spirit-infused world which God has created for us.

We live in a playground of glorious, beautiful wonder, and the Spirit is hovering over the surfaces of our lives, playing, delighting in us, calling us to a journey of encounter, a journey of meaning, in a journey of discipleship and fulfilment. And in some mysterious way, the Bible, the Holy Scriptures, do work in us through the Spirit of God, that show us again how to see how the world actually is. And the story of Ruth is not simply something to learn from, it's not simply something that we take a principle or three away from and try to live better lives because of. The Bible is our story. In the Bible – we discover the story of all humanity tucked away in there. The story of the Bible ultimately is the story of God who made us and who has come for us in the person of Jesus Christ, to save us, to redeem us, and to restore our world to God. And the Bible catches every storyline of humanity and puts them in relationship to Jesus. And so Ruth, even though on the surface God doesn't seem to be a major feature of this story, this is part of the story of God. Because God has made us and called us and redeemed us through Jesus Christ, this then is our story, in Him.

And because this is part of our story, this chapter of Ruth, and because Jesus has called us and saved us and triumphed over sin and death, because he has poured out

his Spirit upon us, I realised as I laid on the couch this afternoon, that what I was longing for was right there at the edge of my fingertips.

God has come to me. I'm never going to be alone again. Even in my pain and in the deepest emptiness that I've experienced, Jesus stands with me and weeps alongside me. The world is pulsating with glory and power, and as I read the words, meeting Ruth and journey with her from emptiness to openness, from the sharp pain of an open wound to a quiet but radical gift of service, it's not just that I learn something about myself, nor is it that I get inspiration to be a better human – I get to see what life is actually like again. Because these scriptures, the strange new world of the Bible, is God's word, and God's word is alive and active, and God's word is truth, and the whole scriptures point to Jesus Christ the Word of God, and they testify to him. And the Holy Spirit is illuminating the scriptures, and working through them, and challenging us through them, and changing us through them. The Holy Spirit longs for us to become more passionate followers of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit wants us to understand Ruth chapter 1. The Holy Spirit wants Ruth chapter 1 to get inside us, enter into us, help us to see the way things actually are. The Holy Spirit wants us to see that the world is pulsating with the glory of god. The Holy Spirit wants us to know that we are loved like we cannot even begin to imagine. The Holy Spirit wants us to know that we were made with a purpose, and then we are here for a reason, that life matters, and that you are unique and gifted and wonderful. Life is enchanted. Life is good. Life is more than just striving for the success that the world tells you you're looking for. Life is more than just living for the weekend. Life is more than just moving from school to uni and from uni to a job and from a job to a house and from a house to a spouse and from a spouse to a baby and from a baby to a promotion and from a promotion to a new house and a new house to a new car and a new car to retirement. Life and so much more. God is active in this world. And you're invited to be a part of it.

So let's dive into this Scripture.

1. **“Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud.” (9)**

There is real pain here. Unbearable pain, the pain of lost futures, destroyed hopes, the pain of not knowing if survival is possible and experiencing a true sense of darkness, emotional trauma, and devastation.

Sometimes all that is left is to weep, to cry, to grieve. It times of hurt and despair, to weep aloud may be the only honest thing left to do. To cry may be the only thing you have left that allows you to embrace your humanity. Emptiness. This is OK. It's good to name it.

You may had to grieve like this. You may have had painful things in your life that have caused you to “weep aloud” - or you may have those things now.

What space do you need to make in your life so that you can give proper expression to your pain?

2. **“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.” (16)**

This is a big gift that Ruth is giving Naomi right here. It is faithfulness that goes beyond the bounds (*hesed*). Nothing is tying her to this. To follow through on this she will be leaving her homeland, she need not do so, and she has been emotionally released from this relationship. Her sister in law when pressed feels released to do so, and it is possibly a wise choice.

In the midst of emptiness, Ruth's gift to Naomi is one of provision. She cannot solve the immediate pain or issues, yet she gives what she has, which is herself and her presence. There is some form of spiritual food in here, nourishment. Unexpected nourishment in the midst of emptiness, And Ruth herself is giving from the place of emptiness!

[See quote on Word p54 "reversed sexual allegiance...there is no more radical decision in all the memories of Israel"]

Like Manna in the desert, small but sufficient provision, Ruth feeds one small part of Naomi's need (for relational support and presence) and in doing so finds that she herself is provided for, both in the relationship that she commits to, and through the future that relationship may open up.

It's like Elijah, in the midst of his despair, pain, fear. Naomi is not abandoned. Elijah far away in the cave is not abandoned. God is in the whispering breeze. God is at work through the faithful daughter in law.

What relationship or situation may God be present to you in that you haven't realised, even in a small way?

Who can you be "a Ruth" to?

3. **"So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem."** (19)

Ruth shows an openness to an uncertain future. She is willing for the sake of love to begin a journey to an unknown land, to make her home among a different people. The journey had a destination, a purpose, it was a place of possibility and hope, but these things are not guarantees. Yet Ruth chose to believe in God and give herself to Naomi, wherever that might bring her. This journey of uncertainty is the outworking of faith, the difficult pro-activity to draw out the inner commitment that she made. The journey to Bethlehem was a journey cementing her commitment and her call to be a person who from in the place of emptiness was honestly and fully human, fully loving and boldly open to the future.

How are you living out such commitments, what is the journey that you are being called on at the moment which is wanting you to put skin in the game and embrace and way of living that demands that you follow through on your commitments?

So let's rest with these learnings from Ruth chapter 1.

Let's we sit with the emptiness of that chapter and consider those places in our own life that we need to give some proper space to. That we need to experience and name

together with others, remembering that it's good too real about the hard stuff. They wept together.

We are reminded that even in the midst of her pain Ruth chose to focus her energies outwards on another, she didn't do well on that which was rightly her own suffering but she chose to give out. She chose to honour and go beyond the call of duty to show *hesed* faithfulness to Naomi – “the most radical decision than all of the memories of Israel” - and this radical and unexpected nourishment from the midst of emptiness is amazing. Who can you be a Ruth to?

And we are reminded of Ruth's openness to the future, a deadly uncertain future. She had no idea if what she was doing was going to work out well. There was every chance that it would be a bad ending. In some ways you might think she didn't have a choice but she showed an openness and a willingness to embrace a path which she was being called to, a path of service and a path of faithfulness.

They were going to Bethlehem. They had a goal. It was a place to aim at, there was the chance that it could be a place of safety. In the midst of a place of no hope there was one beacon of light - there was a place of some hope. It wasn't guaranteed. Bethlehem might have had nothing for Ruth and Naomi. But it was all they had. And they set their sights on that place. And they moved themselves there. They travelled, and they kept on, until they got there. They had a goal and they aimed themselves at it. Bethlehem for Ruth was a journey cementing her commitment and her call to be a person who was fully loving, and boldly faithful, and daringly open to the future.

Let's be the kind of people that live like this world and this life that we have here and now is filled with glory and goodness. Let's live as though the story of Ruth is our story, that the wonder and the struggle and the authenticity and the passionate love and the brave openness toward the future is ours. Let's live like we're called to that kind of thing. Let's live as though our well-being depends upon it.

In the midst of your emptiness,

May you find authentic and creative ways to express your deep grief with honesty, sharing the pain of your humanity with those around you.

And in the midst of that emptiness,

Pay attention to the secret nourishment of sacrificial love.

Keep an eye out for the opportunity to chooses a radical path, a path of *hesed*, beyond the bounds faithfulness, amazing loyalty, shocking kindness.

And stay willing to boldly face the unknown future,

Pursuing a path of life, and holding on to hope

even in the midst of uncertainty.

