

Reflection for Tuesday 12th May 2020

Naomi and Ruth were coming out from a lockdown situation to a new normality....of hope....trauma to triumph



There is a story of two women, Naomi and Ruth, in the Old Testament Book of Ruth. It's one of fortitude, as they faced the future with faith, whatever their fears.

The story starts in Bethlehem, where Naomi lived with her husband, Ebimelech and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion. Then a catalogue of events occurred, which would change their stories and the course of history, through trauma to triumph.....

Trauma: Famine forced the family to leave Judah and migrate to Moab.

Triumph: They settled in the new community.

Trauma: Ebimelech died.

Triumph: The sons married local women.

Trauma: Both sons died.

Triumph: Famine left Bethlehem, so Naomi decided to return, but

Trauma: leaving her two daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth in Moab.

Triumph: Ruth wouldn't let her Naomi go alone, so they journeyed together.

Ruth clung to Naomi saying **“where you go, I will go...your people shall be my people and your God my God”**.

What feelings does this story provoke:

Love, commitment, fortitude, trust, faith...?

There would also have been fear for the future and the new 'unknowns'.

These two women were vulnerable journeying on their own and how would they be received back in Bethlehem?

Naomi would feel failure and shame – leaving Bethlehem with much and returning with little and yet, Ruth's commitment would become a real blessing.

Hope and faith led to favour, as Ruth was guided to work harvesting in a field belonging to Boaz, from the clan of her late Father-in-law, Ebimelech.

As Ruth and Naomi and Boaz conducted themselves according to the rules, regulations and rites of passage of the day, this led to Ruth and Boaz marrying.

The new family was secure and the baby Ruth and Boaz gave birth to was called Obed. At last Naomi not only had a kinsman who would take of her and Ruth, but a grandson who would become the grandfather of David. History would in due course make Bethlehem a birthplace for Jesus Christ himself. Matthew's Gospel historically records there were 14 generations from David to the exile to Babylon and 14 generations from the exile to the birth of Jesus Christ.

Naomi and Ruth allowed a hopeless situation to become hopeful. It happened because they were willing to go on together, in trust, by faith, not by sight.

The traumas of life were real. What was 'known' and 'normal' was never to be the same again. Change after change had to be processed and a new way found through, step by step, in hope and faith and trust.

God was in it all with them. He was guiding them to new beginnings.

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I've just been hearing accounts of businesses on the edge of going bust and men fighting back the tears, in desperation and hopelessness.

One was the owner of a Garden Centre. The owner then decided to do something which wasn't 'known' and 'normal'. He would give away all his plants with notes to say they were gifts, because otherwise they would just perish and become compost. Volunteers delivered them to households in the community. So many people were thankful that they gave back monies which hopefully, would keep the business going after all. One message was read out "you are in our prayers".

Earlier I was in a virtual meeting with teenagers from the Air Training Corps. We were talking about the lockdown, with its traumas and triumphs.

More than one spoke of the positive fact that they had come to appreciate what before they had taken for granted.

Over and over again, through the traumas of the people of Israel's broken promises, to their obedience to do His will, God brought the people to a triumphal recovery, reiterating the foundational relationship that was required for the confidence to grow:

Leviticus 26: 12 "I will walk among you and be your God and you will be my people".

When Jesus had risen from the dead, two people were journeying to Emmaus. They were traumatised, because Jesus had been killed. Jesus appeared, as he'd risen from the dead and walked with them, but they didn't recognise him. In Luke 24 we read "As they approached the village, Jesus acted as if he were going further. But they urged him strongly, **"Stay with us...so he went in to stay with them"**.

The people invited Jesus to be with them. There had been something about him that comforted them, reassured them, gave them strength and purpose and hope.

He later broke bread with them and then their eyes were opened to who he really was. What a revelation of God's triumphant purposes fulfilled in His Son.

In all the traumas, we can find strength and hope to journey together, through to the triumph of the new 'normal'. If we acknowledge God the Father and Jesus Christ the Saviour are walking with us, the words of the hymn 'Great is Thy faithfulness' ring true:

**Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth
Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide;
Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow,
Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!**

God is with us. He promises: **"I will walk among you and be your God and you will be my people"**

In John chapter 14 Jesus said: **"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me....I am the way and the truth and the life....Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him".**



A prayer set for Sunday 10th May: **Eternal God, whose Son Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life: grant us to walk in his way, to rejoice in his truth, and to share his risen life; who is alive and reigns, now and for ever. Amen.**