

## **Session 2—Transform**

*To follow God is a life time decision and a life changing decision*

**Principal Text:** Ruth 1: 1-22

**Supportive Texts:** Ruth 4:13–17; Matthew 1:1-5a.

### **We will consider:**

- Handling bereavements and crisis in one's life.
- Picking up the pieces after crisis, confessing to the bitterness of life and letting go of it with the help of safe and supportive networks.
- Turning lives around so that others can see and witness to God as the restorer of all life.

**Hymn Suggestion** (*Found in Evangelical Lutheran Worship*) “All Who Hunger, Gather Gladly,” #461.

### **Prayer**

Eternal God, who has formed us and knows us as we are, we thank and praise you for the many ways you make your presence known to us. We thank you for those who have walked with us every step of our way; particularly in times of trials, bereavement, dislocation, loss of livelihood, deprivation and loneliness. We thank you for your covenant relationship with us through your son Jesus Christ, the bread of life, who has given us the power to rise above all situations. We thank you for families and friends and the many committed well-wishers who help us transform our lives. Empower us so that what we think, speak and do would bear witness to your faithful, loving kindness, and make us all to praise you. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

### **Introduction**

We continue with the reflections on the women named in the genealogy of Jesus. Today's Bible study is about two women of different ages and of different races who worship different gods, and yet transcend all those boundaries to come together and care for one another. Trusting in God's favour, each of them overcomes her destitution, and together they create a heart-warming story of God's lavish provision.

It testifies to the truth that “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him.” (Corinthians 2:9).

### **Read Ruth 1:1-22**

The story of Ruth takes place before the establishment of a monarchy; during the time of judges. The story is about the basics of life: food—or the lack thereof, family life, migration, death, birth and companionship; of boundaries that limit and divide people to their detriment. It is a story beginning and ending in the town of Bethlehem, which means the ‘house of bread.’

## How Then Shall We Live? Following Christ in a Broken World

Ironically, at that time in Bethlehem (the house of bread) there is a famine and the family of Elimelech decides to move to Moab, a neighbouring country across the river Jordan, to seek bread and livelihood. There they gain two Moabite young women as daughters-in-law.

While the name Elimelech means ‘God is King’ and Naomi means ‘pleasant,’ the names of their sons, Mahlon and Chilion do not hold much promise. Mahlon meant ‘sickly’ and Chilion meant ‘failing’ or ‘consumption.’ The unfortunate names foretell the ill health that will ultimately claim the lives of the two sons within ten years of marriage, leaving Naomi, Ruth and Orpah stranded.

The story revolves around the two women and their coping mechanisms, but is set in a patriarchal time when the real change in their life situation could only be brought about by men; the decision-makers.

It might seem reasonable that Naomi decides to return to her home town, Bethlehem when she hears “that the LORD had considered his people and given them food.” She also has sound reasons for advising the two young women to go back to their own mother’s family in Moab and to their gods. Back home in her native land, it would have been impossible to be remarried to any of the Israelites. Though the Israelites did not condemn marriage between the Moabites explicitly, they had a law that forbade the Moabites from entering the congregation of Israel for ten generations (Deut 23: 3-4). Another irony is to be found in the fact that this law was passed because the Moabites refused to give the Israelites bread and water when they were in exodus before entering into Canaan.

Orpah decides to heed Naomi’s advice and return home, but Ruth responds with an emphatic fourfold statement of commitment; she would follow wherever Naomi went; she would stay wherever Naomi would choose to stay; Naomi’s people would be her people and Naomi’s God would be her God. Her decision—her faith-mission—to accompany her mother-in-law and to care for her means forfeiting her own identity, her self-interest and the familiar comfort of her own country, family and her gods.

Focussing on being a companion for Naomi helps Rachel transform her own sense of bereavement. We can find this in the way Naomi dejectedly asks the women who came to commiserate with her about her loss of husband and sons to call her Mara, which means “bitter” and remarks, “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?” (Ruth 1:21). Naomi lets her grief cloud her vision from seeing the gracious consolation and constant companionship God has already planted in her life in the person of Ruth.

Yet, in the following chapters, one reads an endearing story. Ruth, having an abiding hope that she would find favour in the sight of someone, launches out in faith to seek some food. Her faith in God’s favour leads her to find the gleanings of grain left in the field belonging to Boaz and she is adequately provided for.

This gives Naomi the idea to convince Boaz to marry Ruth, thereby reinstating her and Ruth as kinsmen. Ruth would later give birth to a child who would one day become grandfather to King David. The women around Naomi are moved to testify, “Bless 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.” (Ruth 4:14-15).

## How Then Shall We Live? Following Christ in a Broken World

### Discussion

1. How did Naomi relate to God in her time of bereavement? In what ways do we relate to God in our times of desperation and emptiness?
2. How did God remove the emptiness in Naomi's life? What promises in the Bible kept you going in your time of need?
3. What are the facilities in your community that offer hospitality to strangers, foreigners and the destitute? How is your church community involved in welcoming the stranger?
4. Is plurality of culture and faiths in your context worrisome or welcomed? Discuss.
5. What affirmations do you receive when you reflect on Jesus as the Bread of Life?

### Closing Activity

Form a circle with enough space apart from one another so that arms can be stretched sideways without touching one another. Think of a moment of loss in your life or in the life of a person dear to you, or of a time that made you feel that you were carrying a heavy cross. Stand firm with arms stretched sideways, with heads hanging down as though nailed to a cross. Keep the position and think of the pain and the sense of loss you underwent and say a prayer in silence for those who undergo similar pains or loss. Hold the position for about three minutes, until you feel the pain in your arms. Then come close together in the circle until your arms overlap and support each others. Think of those who have helped you carry the cross or eased the pain in your life, and thank God for their timely service. Then think about how you could be/are part of such a circle of fellowship.

**Closing Prayer** (*An extemporary prayer may be offered by any member of the group.*)

**Text for Remembrance**—Corinthians 2:9 (*Said together.*)

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him.”