



Walking with Ruth

Exploring active reflection, wellbeing and mental health.

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Scripture is full of stories of journeys; Abraham's long road to a new land, Exodus and the subsequent forty years in the wilderness, the road to Bethlehem and Jesus' footsteps to Jerusalem and ultimately to Calvary, Resurrection and Emmaus.

The term 'going on a journey' has become hackneyed and every reality star and 'celebrity' is full of tales of the journey they have undertaken to get to the place where they now reside.

Yet journeying with God, whether it is a long spell in His presence or a quick 'catch up' along the road, is vital to us for our wellbeing: emotional, social, physical as well as spiritual.

There is a long history of 'prayer journeys' in our Christian tradition. Labyrinths were devised when pilgrimages to the Holy Land were too remote or dangerous, Stations of the Cross were devised to allow believers to 'walk with Jesus' from Jerusalem to Calvary. Pilgrim roads to Walsingham and the Carmino de Santiago in Spain all serve to give people times to walk and reflect.

A journey can be taken alone, in the quiet of our room, on a country walk, in the car or train. It can be shared with friends, in staffroom meetings, on walks between classrooms or, as here today, in a prayer walk around a designated area.

Walking with Ruth is one such prayer journey. It is planned around the place where we are meeting today but you could adapt it to use in any setting. It is based on the story of Ruth and uses her journey from the land of Moab to Israel as a spiritual journey during Lent, travelling towards a new life with Naomi, even as we travel towards Holy Week and the Resurrection.

Pope Francis says:

Walking is an art; if we are always in a hurry we tire and cannot reach our destination, the destination of our journey. Yet if we stop and do not move, we also fail to reach our destination.

Walking is precisely the art of looking to the horizon, thinking about where I want to go, and also coping with the weariness that comes from walking. Moreover, the way is often hard-going, it is not easy. "I want to stay faithful to this journey, but it is not easy; listen: there is darkness, there are days of darkness, days of failure, and some days of falling... someone falls, falls".

Yet always keep this in your thoughts: do not be afraid of failure, do not be afraid of falling. In the art of walking it is not falling that matters, but not "staying fallen".

Get up quickly, immediately, and continue to go on. And this is beautiful: it is working every day, it is walking humanly.

But also: it is terrible to walk alone, terrible and tedious. Walking in community, with friends, with those who love us: this helps us, it helps us to arrive precisely at the destination where we must arrive.

Let us begin:



Walking with Ruth

Home Base to Station 1:

Read

Ruth 1:1-7

In the days when the Judges were governing, a famine occurred in the country and a certain man from Bethlehem of Judah went - he, his wife and his two sons - to live in the Plains of Moab.

The man was called Elimelech, his wife Naomi and his two sons Mahlon and Chilion; they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem of Judah.

Going to the Plains of Moab, they settled there.

Elimelech, Naomi's husband, died, and she and her two sons were left.

These married Moabite women: one was called Orpah and the other Ruth.

They lived there for about ten years.

Mahlon and Chilion then both died too, and Naomi was thus bereft of her two sons and her husband.

She then decided to come back from the Plains of Moab with her daughters-in-law, having heard in the Plains of Moab that God had visited his people and given them food.

So, with her daughters-in-law, she left the place where she was living and they took the road back to Judah.



As you walk from the Home Base to Station 1:

Reflect:

Have you experienced setting out on a journey from a place where you feel comfortable? When have you been 'bereft'? Notice how the journey goes from Bethlehem and returns there after a period of time. What experiences do you have of returning 'home'? Are they joyful memories, memories of past conflicts or times of sadness and loss?



Pray:

Ask for guidance and perseverance when you find yourself in unfamiliar circumstances.

Act:

Remember those 'returning' journeys. Share or store them up in your heart. Make a resolution to return to a place of memories.

Station 1:

Read

Ruth 1:8-10, 14-19

Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, 'Go back, each of you to your mother's house. May the LORD show you faithful love, as you have done to those who have died and to me. The LORD grant that you may each find happiness with a husband!' She then kissed them, but they began weeping loudly, and said, 'No, we shall go back with you to your people.'

... Orpah then kissed her mother-in-law and went back to her people. But Ruth stayed with her. Naomi then said, 'Look, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her god. Go home, too; follow your sister-in-law.'

But Ruth said, 'Do not press me to leave you and to stop going with you, for wherever you go, I shall go, wherever you live, I shall live. Your people will be my people, and your God will be my God.

Where you die, I shall die and there I shall be buried. Let the LORD bring unnameable ills on me and worse ills, too, if anything but death should part me from you!'

Seeing that Ruth was determined to go with her, Naomi said no more. The two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem.

As you walk from Station 1 to Station 2

Reflect:

Like refugees today, Ruth and Naomi did not have the privilege of choosing to stay in their homes. Forces beyond their control left them no other choice but involuntary relocation. There are currently 60 million individuals who are living as refugees or displaced persons in every region across the globe.

What experience do you have of refugees? Are they merely an image on the news or are they 'real' in your own life?

Pray:

Pray for the disposed and homeless.

Act:

During this season of Lent take time to engage with the work of a homeless charity or with refugee families.



Station 2:

Read:

Ruth 2: 1-7, 8-12

Naomi had a kinsman on her husband's side, well-to-do and of Elimelech's clan. His name was Boaz. Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi, 'Let me go into the fields and glean ears of corn in the footsteps of some man who will look on me with favour.' She replied, 'Go, daughter.' So, she set out and went to glean in the fields behind the reapers. Chance led her to a plot of land belonging to Boaz of Elimelech's clan. Boaz, as it happened, had just come from Bethlehem. 'The LORD be with you!' he said to the reapers. 'The LORD bless you!' they replied. Boaz said to a servant of his who was in charge of the reapers, 'To whom does this young woman belong?' And the servant in charge of the reapers replied, 'The girl is the Moabitess, the one who came back with

Naomi from the Plains of Moab.⁷ She said, "Please let me glean and pick up what falls from the sheaves behind the reapers." Thus she came, and here she stayed, with hardly a rest from morning until now.'

As you walk from Station 2 to Station 3

Reflect:

Boaz has come from Bethlehem - 'House of Bread'. Ruth has come from a distant place to work in his fields. Boaz shows concern for Ruth's welfare and acknowledges her devotion.

Migrant workers are often open to exploitation. Consider their circumstances. Reflect on what you see and hear in the news and around you. How does this contrast with how Boaz treats Ruth?



either / or

Pray:

For all workers, that those who suffer from exploitation, discrimination and hardship may be rescued from their 'slavery' and allowed the basic rights of human dignity.

Act:

Who are your work colleagues? How do you treat them? Resolve, today, to acknowledge their work in a positive way when you return from this place.



Station 3:

Read:

Ruth 2: 8-12

Boaz said to Ruth, 'Listen to me, daughter. You must not go gleaning in any other field. You must not go away from here.

Stay close to my work-women.

Keep your eyes on whatever part of the field they are reaping and follow behind. I have forbidden my men to molest you. And if you are thirsty, go to the pitchers and drink what the servants have drawn.' Ruth fell on her face, prostrated herself and said, 'How have I attracted your favour, for you to notice me, who am only a foreigner?'

Boaz replied, 'I have been told all about the way you have behaved to your mother-in-law since your husband's death, and how you left your own father and mother and the land where you were born to come to a people of whom you previously knew nothing.

May the Lord repay you for what you have done, and may you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!'

As you walk from Station 3 to Station 4:

Reflect:

Why did Boaz choose to treat Ruth with kindness? Boaz has heard how she has cared for her grieving mother-in law. He chooses to reward her *'even though'* she is not one of his race. Ruth chooses to act in solidarity with Naomi and to follow her wherever she chooses to go.

Pray:

Bring to mind a family member in need at this time. Pray for them.

Act:

The news is full of stories of problems of conflict over race, gender, generational gaps and the like. There are less common instances of individuals working to bring peace to divided neighbourhoods and communities. Resolve to find ways to heal divisions between people.



Station 4 (refreshment stop)

Read:

Ruth 3:1-2, 7-11, 15

Her mother-in-law Naomi then said, 'Daughter, is it not my duty to see you happily settled?

And Boaz, the man with whose work-women you were, is he not our kinsman? Tonight he will be winnowing the barley on the threshing-floor...

When Boaz had finished eating and drinking, he went off happily and lay down beside the pile of barley. Ruth then quietly went, turned back the covering at his feet and lay down.

In the middle of the night, he woke up with a shock and looked about him; and there lying at his feet was a woman.

'Who are you?' he said; and she replied, 'I am your servant Ruth. Spread the skirt of your cloak over your servant for you have the right of redemption over me.'

'May the LORD bless you, daughter,' he said, 'for this second act of faithful love of yours is greater than the first, since you have not run after young men, poor or rich. Don't be afraid, daughter, I shall do everything you ask, since the people at the gate of my town all know that you are a woman of great worth...

He then said, 'Let me have the cloak you are wearing, hold it out!' She held it out while he put six measures of barley into it and then loaded it on to her; and off she went to the town.

Reflect / Pray / Act:

Consider how Boaz is well fed himself and settles to sleep on the threshing floor amidst the harvest. Consider how he ensures that Ruth has food, not only for herself but for Naomi too.

As you pause at the refreshment stop reflect on meals shared with friends. Share your food with one another joyfully. Thank God for food and friendship.

After refreshment stop:

Read:

Ruth 4: 13-15, 17

So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. And when they came together, the LORD made her conceive and she bore a son.

And the women said to Naomi, 'Blessed be the LORD who has not left you today without anyone to redeem you. May his name be praised in Israel!

The child will be a comfort to you and the prop of your old age, for he has been born to the daughter-in-law who loves you and is more to you than seven sons.'

And the women of the neighbourhood gave him a name. 'A son', they said, 'has been born to Naomi,' and they called him Obed. This was the father of Jesse, the father of David.

As you return from Station 4 to Home Base

Reflect:

Boaz was termed a 'kinsman redeemer'.

Deuteronomy 25:5 –6 directed that a relative of a man who dies should marry that man's widow in order to perpetuate his lineage through this woman. Boaz was a relative to Ruth's husband who had passed away, so he was qualified to marry her and perpetuate his lineage. So, even in the midst of Ruth and Naomi's awful affliction, God still had a plan to care for them. In the story of Ruth, God eliminates boundaries between people. The Israelites might have considered Ruth an alien and outsider. Yet, God chose to place her in the lineage of David and, ultimately, of Jesus, the Messiah. Where have you seen the 'hand of God' in your life? Is it comforting or scary to know that God has a plan for you?

Pray:

Thank God for the blessings and graces you have received and pray for spiritual strength, guidance and perseverance when things seem dark.

Act:

Resolve to put time aside during Lent to review your day and to identify at least one 'blessing' and one 'challenge' you have encountered. Try to see this as the hand of God at work in you.

