

## THEME: Walk the Extra Mile (Where you go, I will go. . .)

**PRIMARY SCRIPTURE:** Ruth 1:1–22

### OTHER SCRIPTURES

Psalter—Psalm 146

Epistle—2 Corinthians 5:16–21

Gospel—John 15:1–17 (or 12–17); Or, Matthew 5:38–48

The One Great Hour of Sharing offering this year focuses on refugees and displaced persons. There is no better biblical story to accompany this work than that of Ruth and Naomi.

Brief yet profound, in the opening passage of Ruth we encounter the resilience of two women who have been widowed, as well as ravaged by the natural disaster of famine. These ecological and socio-political events rendered Naomi and Ruth the most vulnerable in their society. Just like refugees today, Ruth and Naomi did not have the privilege of choosing to stay in their homes, but were forced to relocate.

The Book of Ruth can be read as both a human story and a God story, the former “incarnating” the latter. As a human story, we read about *the spirituality of solidarity*, which is richly encapsulated in verses 16 and 17. In the divine realm, we read of God’s redemption, which is mirrored or reciprocated in the human act of solidarity.

Redemption means that God stands in solidarity with us. Many times when we hear the story of Ruth, the human archetype for God is Boaz, the “kinsman redeemer” who “redeems” Ruth, securing a life for her. But the divine act of redemption can also be seen in the sacrificial commitment Ruth makes to Naomi to go where she goes and stay where she stays. The mutuality of their relationship is good news for a globalizing world that so often separates people into groups “them” and “us”.

## Hymn/Song Suggestions

Lead Me, Guide Me

I Want Jesus To Walk With Me

Guide My Feet

Help Us To Help Each Other

In Christ There Is No East And West

Will You Let Me Be Your Servant

Healer Of Our Every Ill

For The Beauty Of The Earth

God of Justice—Tim Hughes

Until all are Fed—Bryan McFarland

All Who Are Thirsty—Brenton Brown

I Will Follow—Chris Tomlin

We Are One Body—Dana Scallon

There Are Many Gifts—Patricia Shelly

—Assembled by Amanda Garcia

Applying the words of the theologian Roberto Goizueta to Ruth, to operate out of a mindset of community and mutual encouragement is to apply “a theology of *acompañamiento* [accompaniment]”. In other words, the God who abides in the Ruth story is revealed in the very act of accompanying the most vulnerable in society—both then and now.

Similarly, God is revealed to us in our accompanying of the refugee. As God walks with those who have been displaced, we may see God as we walk together with them as well. Consequently, we, like the refugee, come face-to-face with our own need and vulnerability; seeing God in the midst of all that is. This is an opportunity for Christians to reignite faith and reframe our humanity in our encounter with the faith and humanity of the other. We are able to recognize the transforming power of solidarity, not just for “them” but for “us.” After all, through the eyes of *acompañamiento*, there is only a united “us”!

The passage in Ruth can be approached in many ways. Here are three ways (not mutually exclusive) of entering the story of Ruth and proclaiming its implications for the Church’s ministry with and for refugees:

- A. The Ruth/Naomi covenant personifies the Church’s call to justice for refugees. Reading about their journey through the lens of our globalizing world (and the refugee phenomenon it engenders), and viewing our globalizing world through the lens of Ruth and Naomi’s journey, we can hear our call to stand with refugees as a *mutual act of vulnerability and hope*. *Solidarity is a spiritual discipline because by engaging in it, we encounter God.*
- B. Each stanza of line in verses 16 and 17 can serve as a structuring device to explore dimensions of solidarity. For example, “Where you go, I will go,” asserts that incarnational presence is foundational for solidarity; and “your people shall be my people” calls for identifying with “the other”. The spiritual depth of solidarity can be highlighted by the stanza “your God my God”. In a world where the power of words is depleting, this in-depth “word study” centeredness in verses 16 and 17 might help recover the substance of the word “solidarity”.
- C. There are two planes (one explicit and the other implicit) on which the Ruth narrative operates: the human and the divine. The act of solidarity is the human corollary of the divine act of redemption. A good approach to the two planes might highlight the relationship between our theology and our ethics. In other words, our vision of God should inform our way of being in the world. In Ruth, the portrait of God is painted by two women choosing solidarity. God is therefore one who chose to stand in solidarity with us, whether we are from Judah or Moab. There are various theological traditions from which to draw, including liberation (God accompanying those who suffer), and Eastern Orthodox (incarnation as God taking on flesh to be in “solidarity” with all flesh).

