



Daily Devotionals

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RUTH 1:19-22 SEEING THE LIGHT

Written by Rev. Dr. Charles D. (Chuck) Alley, Ph.D., Rector of St. Matthew's Episcopal Church, Richmond, Va.

¹⁹ *So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, "Can this be Naomi?"*

²⁰ *"Don't call me Naomi," she told them. "Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. ²¹ I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The LORD has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me."*

²² *So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabitess, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.*

She may have left Bethlehem with her husband and two sons as Pleasant (Naomi), but she has returned as Bitter (Mara) for she is empty, seemingly bereft of everything but a widowed, childless and foreign daughter-in-law. Yet even in her bitter and desperate condition she chooses to bring the focus to God.

This passage reads like a picture that at first looks like one thing and then upon study can be seen to be something else. Perhaps the most prevalent of such pictures is the one that appears to be the silhouettes of two people facing each other, but when you focus on the white area instead of the black it is the picture of a vase. Naomi returns empty, the very antithesis of one who is blessed by God. Her past has been wiped out and she has no future to speak of. She even proclaims her bitterness. It is the picture of one who has been abandoned by God. Yet upon closer inspection she is declaring her closeness to God but proclaiming that all she has experienced has been the direct and personal work of God in her life. Where the blackness in the picture of her life would justifiably in worldly terms lead Naomi to despair and alienation from God, she places her focus on the light – the God who is in the middle of even the darkest experiences in our lives.

To have such a perspective you have to take God personally. An other-worldly god who exists only in the categories of theological reflection is too theoretical and too tidily confined in the golden casket of our understanding to have such bitterness and affliction attributed to him. When God becomes a sanitized Idea then we divorce a significant

area of our lives from his influence – we look only at the dark and do not comprehend the light. Naomi's proclamation is not an act of heresy it is a magnificent portrayal of faith. The God who took your sin upon himself on the cross is surely not so distant as to be excluded from your suffering. Does he cause my suffering? I have no idea. Is he mighty enough to do so? You bet he is. And if he is mighty enough to cause it, then he also is more than capable of delivering me from it. Study the picture of your life and train yourself to see the Light.

Lord, spare me from seeing my life as a paint-by-the-numbers picture, but rather as a canvas upon which you paint with absolute creativity. Even when the brush strokes do not feel good, may I see your loving and merciful hand at work in presenting me as a masterwork that is a tribute to the Artist. May I see you in every aspect of my life and give you credit and praise under all circumstances so that the world can know your almighty nature. Amen.

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