

Suzanna VERGOUWE

*Art and Faith: Ruth and David,**People who Never Met, Or?*

When thinking about possible Biblical role models in certain situations, my perception is not purely rational, not entirely linked to the things they have said, but rather to their way of being, to their choices and their faith, their energies. Although it might appear a bit difficult to talk about, I would like to explain more about these energies. Perhaps it is rather some hard-to-capture sort of an inner-or interconnectedness.

Since I could not decide which of these two Biblical personalities to choose, I will speak about both of them. The first one is Ruth, a courageous woman who clearly made a choice, and the second one is David. And, what a coincidence, they happen to be connected, Ruth being the great grandmother of David.

RUTH, THE WOMAN OF TRUST AND DECISION

Ruth never imagined that her life would work out the way it did. She grew up in a safe environment, was loved by her parents, I presume, and she happily married a man who was not from her town or tribe. Maybe she had asked him many times about his home country, what it was like out there. Maybe she had asked her mother-in-law, Naomi, as well. Ruth was the one who was at home, feeling comfortable with the people, knowing every street and alley in her town. Who knows, maybe she had never paid a visit to any other place.

Then the big change came into Ruth's life: her husband died. Nothing is written about her feelings at that time, or her grief. But surely, as a young widow, must have despaired. Naomi did not have any other sons, whom she could marry as the tradition prescribed. So Ruth's chances of remarriage did not provide her with much optimism.

Naomi realised this and urged both Ruth and her other daughter-in-law, Orpa, to find a husband from among their own kin. Ruth refused. She was determined to go with Naomi in whatever way the Lord would decide. Perhaps, she had begun to be intrigued by this God, and had put some of her faith in God already.

Together they returned to Judea. She must have been afraid, among those people whom she did not know, whose language she did not speak. Add to this her position as a widow of an Israelite man, maybe all of these caused quite a number of sleepless nights for her. But she did not sit down and wait. As much as her decision to leave her country was a conscious one, she acted and started to work in the field. Perhaps she hoped and believed that by acting, by starting somewhere, God would take care of the rest.

Eventually Boaz turned up, the man whose land she was working on. From there, the story unfolded rapidly. Boaz

noticed Ruth, understood that it is him who is to marry her, and so he did. In this way, he ensured her future, and that of Naomi's offspring.

DAVID, THE MAN OF GOD

Two generations after Ruth had married Boaz, David was born in a small town called Bethlehem. When Samuel visited his father's place to anoint him as the king of the Lord, he was not there. He was enjoying his freedom in the fields, playing his music (though also saving his animals from lions), he probably did not understand what all the fuss was supposed to mean. But he must have noticed a change, because the Bible says "from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in power" (1 Samuel 16:13). We know what happened, how he became king, and reigned over Israel.

What strikes me in his life story is the portrait of this king who could never suppress his artistic nature. Intelligent, obeying and wise, but driven by energies striving for adventure and beauty, he must have undergone a restless struggle with these two sides of his personality. Since, above other things, he was the chosen one, he had to face the uneasy question how to live up to this promise, this bondage with God?

One could easily imagine him dancing in front of the arch, having long talks in the evening with Jonathan, worshipping in the temple, or taking decisions for the well-being of the people. I think I understand his way of being. He used his energy and talents in a way he thought was best and inspired. But sometimes his cravings were too strong, and he got lost, as in the case of his love for Bathsheba.

WHATEVER HAPPENS

Ruth and David: they remain connected in my mind, although they might have never met. They were small people with their own life stories who had no clue of what their future would be like. They trusted in God, somehow knowing that in the end, whatever happened would be good. They lived with music, with dancing, by acting, waiting and praying. These individuals' eternal memory will be with me as an inspiration for the whole of my life.

Suggestion

Leonard COHEN wrote a song on David, called *Hallelujah*. It has been sung by a number of artists. My preferred version is the one by Jeff BUCKLEY, from the album *Grace*. It is absolutely worth listening to, I can assure you. Enjoy!

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