

The Story of Ruth and Boaz

Part 1: Ruth 1:6-16

Today we celebrate harvest. If we lived in the past, in the country, we would've been working hard, bringing the harvest in from the fields. And if the harvest were good, we'd be so thankful we had food for the next year.

But nowadays, most of us don't grow our own food, we get it from the shops. And if the harvest is bad in one place, our food is shipped in from another place. So it might be a bit more expensive, but we won't go hungry. And that's something to really thank God for.

But what of those for whom a failed harvest means no food at all. If you stay where you are, you'll starve to death. If you leave your home, you're a stranger at the mercy of others.

Today, we're thinking about a woman named Ruth. There's a whole book in the Bible named after her. But the story doesn't begin with Ruth. It begins with a man from Bethlehem named Elimelech, his wife Naomi, and their two sons, Mahlon and Kilian.

And it begins with a bad harvest. Famine in the land of Judah. It was so desperate, the family decided they had to leave. They left for another country, called Moab. But Elimelech died there, leaving Naomi with her two sons.

The sons married Moabite women, one named Orpah and the other Ruth. And they lived, so far as we know, happily, for about 10 years. But then the two sons died. Naomi was left without her two sons and her husband. And that's where we pick up the story.

This is Ruth, chapter 1, verses 6 to 16.

When Naomi heard in Moab that the LORD had come to the aid of his people by providing food for them, Naomi and her daughters-in-law prepared to return home from there. With her two daughters-in-law she left the place where she had been living and set out on the road that would take them back to the land of Judah.

Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law: Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the LORD show kindness to you, as you have shown to your dead and to me. May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband.



Then she kissed them and they wept aloud and said to her: We will go back with you to your people.

But Naomi said: Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband.

Even if I thought there was still hope for me – even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons – would you wait until they grew up?

Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD's hand has gone out against me!

At this they wept again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye, but Ruth clung to her.

Naomi said: Look, your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.

But Ruth replied: Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God.

Before, Naomi had arrived in Moab as a stranger in a foreign land. Now Ruth was leaving her home, setting out for another country, another culture. And life would be difficult for her. As a widow in that society, she would have no social status. No one to protect her. No one to provide for her. So how would she survive?

We'll pick up the story again later.

Part two: Ruth 2:1-12

Gleaning. Gathering up what's left by the harvesters. When Naomi and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem, the barley harvest was beginning. An opportunity for gleaning. So what did Ruth do?

This is Ruth, chapter 2, verses 1 to 12.


Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side, from the clan of Elimelech, a man of standing, whose name was Boaz.

And Ruth the Moabitess said to Naomi: Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favour.

Naomi said to her: Go ahead, my daughter.

So she went out and began to glean in the fields behind the harvesters.

As it turned out, she found herself working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelech.



Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters: The LORD be with you!

They called back: The LORD bless you!

Boaz asked the foreman of his harvesters: Whose young woman is that?

The foreman replied: She is the Moabitess who came back from Moab with Naomi.

She said: 'Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters.'

She went into the field and has worked steadily from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter.

So Boaz said to Ruth: My daughter, listen to me. Don't go and glean in another field and don't go away from here. Stay here with my servant girls. Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the girls. I have told the men not to touch you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled.

At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She exclaimed: Why have I found such favour in your eyes that you notice me – a foreigner?

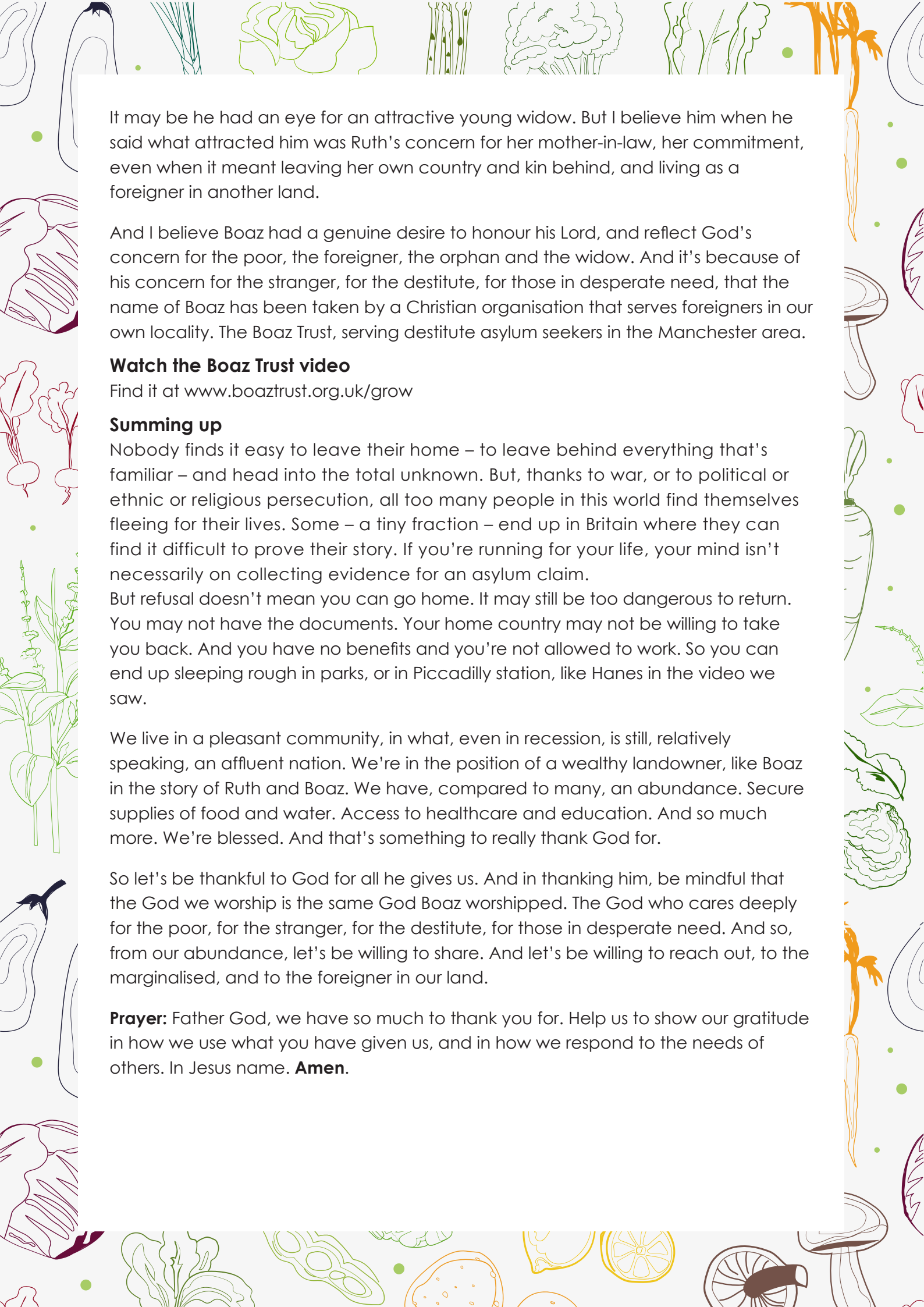
Boaz replied: I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband – how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.

When Ruth met Boaz. It may be no surprise that this turns into a love story. After some complex cultural procedures, Ruth and Boaz were married. They had a son called Obed. And Obed was an ancestor of King David. And, through him, of Jesus.

Ruth, a foreigner in Judah, has a place in the Royal line. And a place in God's plan of redemption for all people. God's plan to make it possible for all of us to know him and to love him. But what of the characters of Ruth and Boaz?

Ruth certainly showed a selfless devotion to her mother-in-law.

She was polite, asking permission to glean, even though she had the right. And she worked hard, taking only a short rest when necessary. And Boaz, he went beyond the call of duty, in his concern for the stranger who appeared in his fields. He ensured she was safe, and had all she needed.



It may be he had an eye for an attractive young widow. But I believe him when he said what attracted him was Ruth's concern for her mother-in-law, her commitment, even when it meant leaving her own country and kin behind, and living as a foreigner in another land.

And I believe Boaz had a genuine desire to honour his Lord, and reflect God's concern for the poor, the foreigner, the orphan and the widow. And it's because of his concern for the stranger, for the destitute, for those in desperate need, that the name of Boaz has been taken by a Christian organisation that serves foreigners in our own locality. The Boaz Trust, serving destitute asylum seekers in the Manchester area.

Watch the Boaz Trust video

Find it at www.boaztrust.org.uk/grow

Summing up

Nobody finds it easy to leave their home – to leave behind everything that's familiar – and head into the total unknown. But, thanks to war, or to political or ethnic or religious persecution, all too many people in this world find themselves fleeing for their lives. Some – a tiny fraction – end up in Britain where they can find it difficult to prove their story. If you're running for your life, your mind isn't necessarily on collecting evidence for an asylum claim.

But refusal doesn't mean you can go home. It may still be too dangerous to return. You may not have the documents. Your home country may not be willing to take you back. And you have no benefits and you're not allowed to work. So you can end up sleeping rough in parks, or in Piccadilly station, like Hanes in the video we saw.

We live in a pleasant community, in what, even in recession, is still, relatively speaking, an affluent nation. We're in the position of a wealthy landowner, like Boaz in the story of Ruth and Boaz. We have, compared to many, an abundance. Secure supplies of food and water. Access to healthcare and education. And so much more. We're blessed. And that's something to really thank God for.

So let's be thankful to God for all he gives us. And in thanking him, be mindful that the God we worship is the same God Boaz worshipped. The God who cares deeply for the poor, for the stranger, for the destitute, for those in desperate need. And so, from our abundance, let's be willing to share. And let's be willing to reach out, to the marginalised, and to the foreigner in our land.

Prayer: Father God, we have so much to thank you for. Help us to show our gratitude in how we use what you have given us, and in how we respond to the needs of others. In Jesus name. **Amen.**