



SIEBENQUELL

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## Do you know Ruth?

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Well, thanks to the Jewish sacred writings and our Christian Bible, her story has been preserved for us for more than 2000 years, told in four chapters in the little book that bears her name. Those with only a passing knowledge of her story may remember a verse: „Whither thou goest, there will I go also; and whither thou abidest, there will I abide also. Your people are my people, and your God is my God." (Ruth 1:16) A wonderful promise - but it raises questions: To whom is Ruth saying this? Where does she come from? Where is she going? These questions lead us right into the middle of a story of borderline experiences, of rejection and belonging, of faithfulness and courageous living.

If you get involved with this little book, you may begin to love Ruth. This young woman is so clear, so full of goodness and devotion, that she was able to change human hearts by the way she lives, and not only in her time.

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Her experiences are not alien to us today. She allowed herself to be challenged as a young widow from Moab to follow her widowed mother-in-law to her old home in Bethlehem. Moab had been hated by Israel since the time of the migration to the Promised Land, because it had been rejected by the Moabites and was not allowed to graze there. The rejection of the Moabites had been established ever since, also in the law. Ruth comes into the midst of this world at the side of her Jewish mother-in-law and takes it upon herself to provide and work for both of their survival. Of course, she is the foreigner in Bethlehem, even worse, the "Moabite", but this does not prevent her from remaining true to herself in her devotion, kindness and love in a reserved, yet clear and determined way. This is her way of living, this is how she acts. We do not hear words of complaint, justification or rebellion against people's stereotypical opinions about Moabites from her mouth. Gently, but steadily, she softens the harshness that stereotypes always create and so often result in violence. She looks at people, in the fields, on the streets, on the threshing floor, and people increasingly perceive her, this Ruth, not just the "Moabite". Her story is a story of resistance against all the teachings that at that time and at all times claimed that strangers were the reason for the problems of society, of religion, the "impurity" of the people. Looking at Ruth and walking a bit with her reveals to us her very own, unconventional way of finding and creating possibilities of life and survival together with her mother-in-law Naomi. Yes, she is different, but what sets her apart? It is her devotion, her kindness and love, her chesed. It was in this attitude that she stayed by Naomi's side on her way to her foreign land and lovingly did all that served life. "Chesed is the absolute love that imposes no conditions, expects nothing in return," wrote a rabbi in the Jüdische Allgemeine two days ago. He describes acts of merciful love and goes on to say, "Chesed, then, is something that involves practical deeds, not just kind thoughts. Chesed is also not a purely interpersonal matter, but a matter between people and the Eternal...".

In the course of the story, Boaz and the whole town experience Ruth's enduring kindness towards the poor widow Naomi, who is, after all, one of their own. On this basis, Boaz eventually and skilfully urges the people to accept Ruth as a native, to give her social protection and to accept her as a full member of the community. Her kindness transforms his heart and leads to the expansion of the law, making Ruth a member of God's people. She becomes a kinsman because of her goodness and not because of her ethnicity. Indeed, is it not the case that belonging can come in different ways?

Those who get to know Ruth will come to love her and cannot escape the enchantment of transformation. She widens our hearts as she widened the hearts of the inhabitants of Bethlehem and so she made this city into that which the name stands for, a "house of bread", food for all.

"Your people are my people and your God is my God" - this is what Ruth had promised her silent mother-in-law on the way to Bethlehem. She still lives out for us today what it means to live with God. For this she is still honoured today in the ancestral line of David - and his ancestral line becomes the ancestral line of Jesus, born in Bethlehem in the land of Judah.

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