

Theme

Shift

Power Point

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1SJ8iZOJjJ344ivPaPv9r6-rcwBBpSy8B/view?usp=sharing>

Slide #2: The Women

This is our last session together. We've studied 5 chapters in Katey's book, *Women Rise Up* and we're beginning to understand why Katey chose this as the title of her book. We've examined the lives of women, most of whom we had heard about, but in the scheme of things were, in their day, marginalized women who had few rights and privileges. BUT, they... "endured (Hagar), resisted (Midwives Shiphrah and Puah), sustained (Widow and the Oil), advocated (Martha of Bethany), and were remembered (Rachel) putting the issue of maternal mortality in front of us.

All these historical, powerful women faced enormous odds as they lived in patriarchal cultures where they were considered property and servants....but, that did not stop them! Their fortitude and their ability to move beyond, or in spite of, their fear made a way for them to exist.

Slide #3– Ruth and Naomi

Tonight, we look at Ruth and Naomi – perhaps two of the most known Biblical women because their story is one of deep love and friendship and, as we know, Ruth found romantic love as well. Like the other women we've studied, Ruth and Naomi didn't have it easy.

In 1960 a movie called "The Story of Ruth" was released. It was a very compelling movie with intrigue and romance as well as the moving story of the friendship between Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi – one of total devotion as they traveled from the Land of Moab, now known as Jordan, into Palestine/Judah where Ruth would find her true love, Boaz. You all know this story.

Slide #4 – Quote from Ruth

After Ruth and Orpah's husbands die, Naomi makes a decision to leave Moab to return to her country of origin – Judah. And after some debate, Orpah decides not to travel with Naomi but to stay where she was, and Ruth, against the will of Naomi, decided to stay with Naomi who was quite elderly. This familiar quote is the one most known from this story and tells of the great love of Ruth for Naomi.

The depth of these words is profound and a promise never to leave Naomi and to adopt her way of life. This decision of Ruth's was a risky one. She was going to a land that was not her own – a foreigner, a widow who was traveling with a widow at a time of famine. Neither woman had many, if any, protections. Their journey would be fraught with danger, but, yet, they persevered. Ruth and Naomi trusted their friendship and had enough faith to move forward.

Slide #5 – Mary Oliver Poem

This Mary Oliver quote gives us another glimpse at what it means to truly know someone and love someone as Ruth and Naomi felt for each other:

“What is the greatest gift?

Could it be the world itself—the oceans, the meadowlark,
the patience of the trees in the wind?

Could it be love, with its sweet clamor of passion?

Something else—something else entirely holds me in thrall.

That you have a life that I wonder about more than I wonder about my own “.

Ruth cared more about the life of Naomi than she did about her own.

Slide #6 – Shift

Katey assigns the word “Shift” to Ruth in this chapter. This word seemed a bit strange to assign to Ruth. Why did Katey choose that word to describe Ruth in her book? What does it mean in light of this story?

Let’s look at the definitions and how they relate:

- To move or cause to move from one place to another, especially over a small distance.

So, this definition certainly applies to the decision Ruth made when she traveled with Naomi to Judah. Ruth *shifted* her position – her place in the world – to go to another land. One could certainly say that this was a major shift. She could have decided like Orpah to stay where she was – in her homeland - but she didn’t. She chose love and friendship over security.

- One of two or more recurring periods in which different groups of workers do the same jobs in relay.

We are all familiar with this definition of shift. Friends or family members might work the first shift at General Motors or Kroger or wherever. In the case of Ruth, her shift was as a worker in the fields, owned by Boaz, as a gleaner which can be brutal work. Her job was to pick up single grains of barley among the stubble and dust of the fields – hot, dirty, back-breaking work – something “lowly” Moabites would be assigned to do.

Katey focuses on immigration in this chapter talking about the plight of migrants who move from place to place to survive. In fact, Katey says “At its core, the Book of Ruth is an immigration story.” Ruth is identified as a “foreigner,” and “outsider,” “one who truly doesn’t belong.” Ruth is not one of us!

Slide #7 – Immigration Statistics

- North America ranks 3rd highest for migrants with more than 54 million living on the continent. More than 1 million immigrants arrive in the U.S. each year.
- In 2019, immigrants comprised 13.7 percent of the total U.S. population which equals 45,347,000 people.

- Estimates of the number of undocumented immigrants living in the U.S. range from 10.5 million to 12 million, or approximately 3.2%–3.6% of the population.
- According to the International Labor Organization, there were an estimated 164 million migrant workers globally in 2017.
- According to UN statistics, more than 244 million people are currently living in a different country from the one in which they were born.

Slide # 8 – Migration Trend from 1850 – 2019

Slide #9 – Quote by Rupi Kaur (28-year-old Indian Canadian born poet)

“You split the world into pieces and called them countries, declared ownership on what never belonged to you and left the rest with nothing.”

This harmful movement toward separateness, tribalism existed in Old Testament times as well as now. When you think of it, there are a whole lot of “others” in our country and throughout the world.

(Pause Power Point)

Breakout Session/Small Group Discussion

Questions for discussion: Ruth is a story about identity and otherness. Describe who the “others” are in your context. Have you ever had an experience of being the “other”? How did that feel?

Reporting Out

Have the groups report on their small group discussion as time allows.

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Slide #10 – Ruth and Boaz

Now we come to the part of the story where Ruth meets Boaz. We recall this part of the story when Boaz sees Ruth in the fields and asks his foreman “Whose young woman is that?” or in the version in the book: “To whom does this young woman belong? Boaz doesn’t ask: “Who is that young woman? But rather “Whose young woman is that? These 5 words bring more clarity about the place of women in Boaz’s time. They were “owned” by men. Again, considered property.

We’ve so romanticized this story as referenced by Katey when she writes about the girls in her high school Bible study who adopted the phrase “wait for your Boaz”, a phrase that idealizes Boaz. The perfect man. Someone we all might hope to find. What’s misleading, according to Katey is the assumption that Ruth, too, was waiting for Boaz. But, that’s hardly the case. And, in this part of the story we find another shift in Ruth during this scene of her life – She’s what we’d

call a fairly independent woman, but also savvy. She knows she is a widow. She knows she has no status. And, she's anything but patient. She is a survivor. She's the care-taker of Naomi, and she certainly doesn't sit around pining for someone to save her...although, that is what happens. Boaz has the power. Boaz has the authority, the land, the ability to help her or reject her. Her

shift comes by acknowledging that Boaz can help her and Naomi. She understands the power differential – and allows him to help her.

As we know, he does just that. He offers and gives her and Naomi “living water” in a dry desert. In cruder terms, Boaz becomes Ruth's ticket out of hell, out of an uncertain future and into life. But Ruth chooses that. Katey writes that Ruth was a “risk taker, boundary-crossing survivor who explores unknown places without trepidation. “She does not ‘wait for her Boaz’, but seeks what she needs and takes it without apology.

Ruth and Naomi lived in an unequal time. And, it's good for us to examine that history, but we can't ignore what's happening in our time as reminded us by Katey when she named the issue of immigration – an issue that cannot be viewed in isolation of other issues. Quickly, let's run through some other current realities facing women – and these will not be new to us. United Methodist Women study these issues...but, as a reminder...

Slide #11 – Gender Inequities

These are some of the major inequities faced by women globally:

- **Income inequities** – women continue to earn less than men for the same levels of work, but this is decreasing. (Source: Our World in Data)
- **Land ownership** – Most land worldwide is owned by men
- **Education Disparities** - Less than 40% of countries offer girls and boys equal access to education and only 39% of countries have equal proportions of the sexes enrolled in secondary education. (Source: UNESCO)
- **Reproductive Health** – 214 million women worldwide want, but lack access to, contraception; more than 800 women die daily from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth. (Source: Global Fund for Women)
- **Violence** – 1 in 3 women worldwide experience some level of violence.

Slide #12 – Shadow Pandemic – UN Foundation

This report examines the impact of COVID-19 on gender inequity and found:

- a spike in domestic violence as girls and women are sheltering-in-place with their abusers;
- the loss of employment for women who hold the majority of insecure, informal and lower-paying jobs;
- the increased risk shouldered by the world's nurses, who are predominately women;
- the rapid increase in unpaid care work that girls and women mostly provide already.
- while early reports suggest that men are more likely to succumb to COVID-19, the social and economic toll will be paid, disproportionately, by the world's girls and women.

Slide #12

Kudos to the UN Foundation for publishing these findings which are a clarion call for action.

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The story of Ruth and Naomi, like the other stories we've heard during this Lenten study, further awaken us to the strength and resiliency of women as well as the challenges of women – not only in Biblical times but today.

We're going to go into our break out groups one more time to reflect but also act! Before we do this, let's listen to piece by Langston Hughes entitled "Freedom". As you hear it read, consider Ruth, consider Naomi, consider the millions of persons struggling to find "home" and Freedom.

Freedom by Langston Hughes

Freedom will not come
Today, this year
 Nor ever
Through compromise and fear.

I have as much right
As the other fellow has
 To stand
On my two feet
And own the land.

I tire so of hearing people say,
Let things take their course.
Tomorrow is another day.
I do not need my freedom when I'm dead.
I cannot live on tomorrow's bread.

 Freedom
 Is a strong seed Planted
 In a great need.
 I live here, too.
 I want my freedom
 Just as you.

Breakout Session/Small Group Discussion

Questions for discussion: Remembering the lives of these Biblical women and the millions of women around the globe, what one action might you take to make the lives and witness of these Biblical women more visible in our society?

Reporting Out

Have the groups report on their small group discussion as time allows.

Closing

This session was created by Linda Bales Todd.

