

During Advent a group of us have been exploring Brexit through the lens of the 'book of Ruth – and you can imagine we have had lively discussion!

This small, misplaced, book – which tells a simple, beautiful story, is a mine of inspiration and well worth a read, re-read.

Often it is assumed that the sole purpose of the book of Ruth is to give a genealogy of the great King David...and though it does do this that is not its only purpose.

Indeed we have discovered during Advent that the book of Ruth

- Offers a counter narrative to the prevailing narrative
- Puts compassion ahead of Law
- Breaks down stereo-type and narrow prejudice.

And the conclusion of all this – in four short chapters – is a family tree of King David which in tells us that David’s great-great grandmother was a Moabite!

Matthew in his gospel picks up this genealogy as he tells in his own way of the birth of the Christ – through the lens of Joseph.

Unlike the nativity in Luke’s Gospel – which focusses on Mary and Mary’s response – today’s Gospel tells of the birth of Jesus from Joseph’s point of view.

And, Matthew would say, Joseph brings to the table a godly heritage and lineage. Because it is Joseph who names the child, he claims paternity of Jesus and makes him an heir of David’s line.

So the genealogy we find in the book of Ruth is picked up and extended in Matthew’s gospel in the verses

immediately before the passage we have heard proclaimed today...those preceding verses are set out in pictorial form on the pew sheet.

That family tree might give us the idea that Jesus was a thoroughbred, a pure descendent of a great dynasty. But by including King David, Ruth and Boaz, Perez and Tamar, Matthew reminds us of the imperfections of this line:

- David at times was a scoundrel
- Ruth was from Moab
- Perez' birth by Tamar was in very dubious circumstances.

Matthew reminds us that this line does not trace a golden thread through history – it is full of imperfections and misalignments with the will of God; Matthew reminds us of the all too human nature of Jesus' paternal line.

And I wonder is this Matthew's equivalent of Luke's Magnificat? Mary's song of praise tells how the proud are scattered, the humble and meek exalted, the hungry filled with good things.

Matthew's nativity story, like Ruth's story, tells of the end of the primogeniture rule; of the end of the men holding all the cards; of the elder bowing down to the younger, of a shepherd-child becoming the anointed one; a counter narrative, in which compassion is set above Law, an opening up of grace and a breaking down of prejudice.

Oh yes, we have had great time looking at the book of Ruth this Advent through a different lens – we have had fun and we have been challenged...as we have thought about

- When Home treats you as an alien
- The gender pay gap

- The institutionalisation of food banks
- Migrants, migrant women, migrant women workers

I hope that whatever you have done this Advent it has prepared you to greet the one who welcomes the poor, the lowly and the misaligned, for no matter how unworthy, inadequate or ill-equipped you feel you may well be the next one called to complete the work of Christmas.

ⁱ <https://www.corrymeela.org/news/96/exploring-brex-it-through-the-lens>