

## Women's Voices for Communion Sara – Naomi – Anna (The Canaanite Woman)

Genesis 18: 1-10

A Son Promised to Abraham and Sarah

18 The LORD appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre, as he sat at the entrance of his tent in the heat of the day. <sup>2</sup> He looked up and saw three men standing near him. When he saw them, he ran from the tent entrance to meet them, and bowed down to the ground. <sup>3</sup> He said, "My lord, if I find favor with you, do not pass by your servant. <sup>4</sup> Let a little water be brought, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree. <sup>5</sup> Let me bring a little bread, that you may refresh yourselves, and after that you may pass on—since you have come to your servant." So they said, "Do as you have said." <sup>6</sup> And Abraham hastened into the tent to Sarah, and said, "Make ready quickly three measures of choice flour, knead it, and make bread." <sup>7</sup> Abraham ran to the herd, and took a calf, tender and good, and gave it to the servant, who hastened to prepare it. <sup>8</sup> Then he took curds and milk and the calf that he had prepared, and set it before them; and he stood by them under the tree while they ate.

<sup>9</sup> They said to him, "Where is your wife Sarah?" And he said, "There, in the tent." <sup>10</sup> Then one said, "I will surely return to you in due season, and your wife Sarah shall have a son."

I. Sara

Sara has been waiting years and years to hear this news. And even now she has to overhear it. It's only by accident that she learns that she will finally have the long desired baby... that she has her own contribution to make to this whole story of seeking the promised land.

I bring you of the bread Sara baked when the divine visitors came and fed her hopes for a son.

When she hears the news she laughs. And her laughter makes her open to a new way of looking at her life. Hopes and dreams become alive again, Sara feels young and light and happy.

This is a very old story. And if we look at it carefully and with curious attention...we will discover that this little story is a gem – a treasure to help us in our lives.

This meeting of God with his people at the oaks of Mamre brought Sarah from despairing to hoping, and from hardening to a laughing that can liberate and set people free.

In Sarah's story we can see God's friendliness, even though the reality of the world often denies God's presence. That alone makes the story worth telling.

Right from the beginning it looked as if the content of God's promises would never come to fulfilment. The hope for peace, justice, humanity, solidarity and a home - for many people on this earth it is a dream that doesn't seem to come true... just as Sara's child seemed never to be born...

But: the miracle happens as Sara prepares the bread and hears the men speak.  
God wants to come to her, to let her know his plans for her.  
God wants to change her desperate life story into a future with hope.  
God wants to come close to her in her physical restrictions, in her emotional pain and all the other problems.  
God wants to be with Sara as he always is with those oppressed and aching, with those who have no voice and no place, with those who are at the bottom line of a society that does not value them...  
God is always at the side of those who are in fear, those who hurt and ache, those who are humiliated and discouraged.  
God calls us all, invites us into his kingdom and sets us free to experience the miracle of new life...  
When we eat Sara's bread, a dream may come unexpectedly true...  
a friendship may grow...  
a relationship heal...  
When we eat Sara's bread, love, understanding & liberation may be experienced...  
a new perspective for life may be found, a place that feels like home...  
justice and peace... and God knows what else ...  
When we eat Sara's bread we may learn how to laugh, how to let bitterness go and be filled with happiness and peace.  
And then we may be able to bring forth new life – not necessarily in the form of a son, as Sara did, but in many other ways.  
Sara called her son Isaac – which means: God laughs.  
When we eat her bread, may we feel God's smile on us and may we smile and laugh too.

## Music

### **Ruth 2: 2-7+17+18**

**Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone in whose sight I may find favor." She said to her, "Go, my daughter."<sup>3</sup> So she went. She came and gleaned in the field behind the reapers. As it happened, she came to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech.<sup>4</sup> Just then Boaz came from Bethlehem. He said to the reapers, "The LORD be with you." They answered, "The LORD bless you."<sup>5</sup> Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, "To whom does this young woman belong?"<sup>6</sup> The servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, "She is the Moabite who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab."<sup>7</sup> She said, 'Please, let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the reapers.' So she came, and she has been on her feet from early this morning until now, without resting even for a moment."(...)  
So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley.<sup>18</sup> She picked it up and came into the town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gleaned.**

## II. Naomi

Here is the bread Naomi baked after Ruth had returned from Boaz's field. Naomi saw the grains of wheat, and by the mere sight of them she felt the deep desire to still her hunger...

Suddenly Naomi was able to do things again, to make flour, to light the fire, to knead the dough and put the loaves of bread in the oven.

For a long time she had not been able to do these simple everyday things.

She'd lived in darkness and was unable to find a way out...

But now the smell of the freshly baked bread made her mouth water and filled her with a will for life which she had not had for months. The bread tasted of comfort, of healing, of love and of future...

The Book of Ruth begins when Naomi's story is at the worst.

There is her tragic life story, uprooted from her home in Bethlehem, moved to a foreign land, ripped from her religious foundations, raising two sons in the strange land, seeing them marry women who she had nothing in common with, and finally losing husband and sons and being left alone with two daughters-in-law.

She breaks through the loss of her entire family, her country and her God.

Darkness overcomes her, bitterness takes over... She is determined that God is punishing her. ...that God hates her.

She rebukes those who are happy and alive. Don't call me Naomi, she says. Call me Mara – which means bitter.

She cannot bear the presence of the young women and sends them back to their families.

But one of them, Ruth, refuses to leave her alone.

"Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your God my God..." are the famous words she speaks.

They set off together on a long and dangerous road.

The journey does not make Naomi any better.

At her arrival in Bethlehem she rejects the welcome of her old friends and locks herself in.

Naomi's depression is so deep that she won't even go and gather the remnants of grain left in the fields for the poor. She lets Ruth go instead.

It is only when Ruth comes home with plenty of food for them that Naomi leaves her darkness a bit.

Ruth is optimistic, filled with hope and with love.

Ruth shows great love, great faith and great hope. She has enough of those for two.

Ruth keeps finding light and light places, a future, a dream, hope and love, and eventually the spark jumps over on Naomi and calls out her imagination and her will for life.

With her hunger stilled with the delicious bread Naomi comes up with the idea of Ruth and Boaz falling in love, marrying and eventually founding a family... She sees and initiates a future for them all, plays the vital role in a love story with a happy ending.

So, when we eat her bread, we get our dreams back; dreams of hope and happiness and homes...

Music

### **Matthew 15: 21-28**

#### **The Canaanite Woman's Faith**

<sup>21</sup> Jesus left that place and went away to the district of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>22</sup> Just then a Canaanite woman from that region came out and started shouting, "Have mercy on me, Lord, Son of David; my daughter is tormented by a demon." <sup>23</sup> But he did not answer her at all. And his disciples came and urged him, saying, "Send her away, for she keeps shouting after us." <sup>24</sup> He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." <sup>25</sup> But she came and knelt before him, saying, "Lord, help me." <sup>26</sup> He answered, "It is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." <sup>27</sup> She said, "Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table." <sup>28</sup> Then Jesus answered her, "Woman, great is your faith! Let it be done for you as you wish." And her daughter was healed instantly.

### III. The Canaanite Woman – Anna

The third loaf of bread is Anna's. Anna? You may ask...

Right. There is no Anna in our Bible text.

There is – as so often – a nameless woman, but I call her Anna. I find, she needs a name!

Anna bakes her bread when she gets home from a meeting with Jesus in which she has won: an argument to begin with, a friend for life, and life itself: life in all its fullness for herself and her sick daughter.

Anna discusses bravely and full of self-confidence and knowledge with a foreign man. She overcomes at least two boundaries:

women in those days did not talk to men in public. She did.

Foreigners were not spoken to. She did.

She has a significant voice.

She speaks out loud and becomes a role model for all of us who need to stand up and speak, because there is no one else who will...

Jesus announces a clear job description. The foreign woman and her daughter fell out of his charge. But Anna doesn't accept that and makes him eventually stretch beyond his comfort zones and traditions, widen his horizon and become the Messiah of the world.

The story has both: a theological discussion and a miracle of healing.

Anna dominates the discussion. She is a stranger to Israel and the God of Israel. But she knows what she needs. And she is proven right because of her remarkable persistence! Jesus changes through her. And what she does is called great faith... Anna is an outsider, a descendant of a former enemy, but she knows a surprising amount about the Jewish God and faith. ...about the living God, about Jesus being the Son of David...

Matthew locates the whole story in public by the roadside. Anna is loud, the argument cannot be ignored by those standing or walking by. Her concern about the well-being of her daughter leads her to break all the rules of conduct of her time and place. By how, what and where she is doing what she does, she becomes a prophet for a new life that is possible among those who break down barriers and seek a common future in which all will benefit from the openness and flexibility that the world needs in order to survive.

The disciples wish no change, they want Anna to be sent away. They wish for peace and quiet, want to move on as they always had. Only Jesus gradually understands: the story reaches a turning point after the Anna's fourth argument. Jesus openly states her great faith, and welcomes her into the community of the believers in the living God. He honours her and her courage and her unshakable confidence in him, and her insight into the inclusive power, presence and mercy of God.

Jesus is changed by Anna's boldness. And in a way we could be transformed too, by meeting her, listening to her, letting her share her faith with. When we eat Anna's bread we may be filled with wisdom, courage and determination. When we eat her bread, we may more fully know who Jesus is, and what God can do. When we eat Anna's bread we may grow in boldness and in faith.

May these three stories be milestones on our journey with the Bible, with each other and with our God.  
Amen.

Music