

**Human Trafficking;
Svetlana's Story**

**March 10 – March 16, 2010
Lenten Study 4**

Fact Sheet on Human Trafficking

- Human trafficking is a modern form of slavery and affects all parts of the globe. Since it is illegal and traffickers aim to keep their victims isolated and humiliated, it is difficult to verify exact statistics. The true problem is likely to be significantly bigger than the statistics suggest.
- Worldwide, there are an estimated 27 million modern day slaves. UNIFEM estimates that between 500,000 and 2 million persons are trafficked across international borders each year. Other NGOs estimate the number is nearer 4 million.
- The Uzbek government estimates that around 1000 Uzbek women are illegally trafficked from their country each year, mainly to Turkey or the United Arab Emirates. In the past decade, five or six trafficked Uzbek women have been murdered each year in the UAE. Many others have been imprisoned for visa offences.
- About 80% of trafficking victims are women, 70% of whom are trafficked for the commercial sex industry.
- 60-95% of trafficked women in prostitution have been raped and physically assaulted.
- In some parts of Africa and in the Mekong region, the vast majority of those trafficked are children.
- Trafficking affects virtually every country in the world. The largest numbers come from Asia and the former Soviet Union, which is now believed to be the biggest source of trafficking for the sex industry. Victims are sent to Asia, the Middle East, Western Europe and North America.
- In many countries, women make up the largest proportion of traffickers. In Latvia, women made up 53% of trafficking convictions.
- Trafficking in persons fuels organised crime. Human trafficking in Eastern Europe is estimated to generate between US\$5 and 22 billion in annual revenue. It is closely associated with money laundering, drug trafficking and document forgery.
- Prostitution, legal or decriminalised, is a major global industry. In the Philippines, it is the 4th largest source of gross national product. 300,000 sex tourists from Japan visit the Philippines each year.
- In the Netherlands, the sex industry generates \$1 billion per annum, with 2000 brothels and 30,000 working women, of whom 68-80% come from countries other than Holland.
- In a 9 country survey of nearly 800 women working in the sex trade, 89% wanted to leave the industry, 75% had been homeless at some point and 68% had symptoms of PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder).
- Women in developing countries face the highest risk of becoming victims of trafficking. Poverty, lack of equal opportunity and cultural practices create conditions of vulnerability, which traffickers easily exploit.

Sources: US Department of Justice, US State Department, Salvation Army Canada, UNIFEM, Central Asia-Caucasus Institute

Ruth 3: 1-17 (NRSV)

Ruth and Boaz at the Threshing-Floor

3Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, 'My daughter, I need to seek some security for you, so that it may be well with you. 2 Now here is our kinsman Boaz, with whose young women you have been working. See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing-floor. 3Now wash and anoint yourself, and put on your best clothes and go down to the threshing-floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. 4When he lies down, observe the place where he lies; then, go and uncover his feet and lie down; and he will tell you what to do.' 5She said to her, 'All that you tell me I will do.' 6 So she went down to the threshing-floor and did just as her mother-in-law had instructed her. 7 When Boaz had eaten and drunk, and he was in a contented mood, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she came quietly and uncovered his feet, and lay down. 8At midnight the man was startled and turned over, and there, lying at his feet, was a woman! 9He said, 'Who are you?' And she answered, 'I am Ruth, your servant; spread your cloak over your servant, for you are next-of-kin.' 10He said, 'May you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter; this last instance of your loyalty is better than the first; you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich. 11 And now, my daughter, do not be afraid; I will do for you all that you ask, for all the assembly of my people know that you are a worthy woman. 12But now, though it is true that I am a near kinsman, there is another kinsman more closely related than I. 13Remain this night, and in the morning, if he will act as next-of-kin for you, good; let him do so. If he is not willing to act as next-of-kin for you, then, as the Lord lives, I will act as next-of-kin for you. Lie down until the morning.' 14 So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before one person could recognize another; for he said, 'It must not be known that the woman came to the threshing-floor.' 15Then he said, 'Bring the cloak you are wearing and hold it out.' So she held it, and he measured out six measures of barley, and put it on her back; then he went into the city. 16She came to her mother-in-law, who said, 'How did things go with you, my daughter?' Then she told her all that the man had done for her, 17saying, 'He gave me these six measures of barley, for he said, "Do not go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed."'

Widowhood and desperation for food: Retelling Ruth in the context of human trafficking!

Fulata L. Moyo, PhD

Widowhood and desperation

For many women especially in the global south, widowhood is not just the death of a spouse but also the degeneration to desperation. The realities of unjust global economic systems which deprive the majority while unjustly rewarding the privileged few, has helped paint this desperation in clearly distinguishable contrasting colours. In the colours of the desperate, the women often bear the most colourful ones as the most desperate of the desperate.

Among the Ngoni-Tumbuka in Malawi, when a widow sitting next to the coffin containing the remains of her spouse narrates her mourning story “*Muyeni wane!* (My beloved);” with heaving and trembling, she can already envision the utter desperation for survival that this departure entails for her, her children and other dependants. The book of Ruth in the Hebrew Testament articulates this widowhood desperation in ways that should help today’s Christian reader to contextually address questions like: How do we challenge to transformation social systems that have unjustly subjected widows to desperation where sometimes the commoditization of their bodies for food is the only viable option? Why should some women consider being trafficked to another land as the only way to gain food sovereignty?

Ruth as a trafficked widow?

Ruth, a Moabite, married Mahlon, probably a privileged Hebrew migrant who offered possibilities of a better life. When he died, she decided to stick to her mother-in-law and go to a foreign land. Naomi and Ruth were two desperate dispossessed widows who had to glean for food. As sonless widows, they had no means of reclaiming ‘their’ land. They have each other but without a man, this solidarity is not enough for their survival.

Naomi, not so much unlike powerful traffickers, has to use the young beautiful exotic Ruth. Ruth's body is commoditized in a subtle way. She uncovers Boaz¹'s feet and lies down (Ruth 3:7). This action carries sexual overtones that capture the act of selling sex but Ruth hoped for a more legally-binding end that ensured repossession of land for Naomi.

Some questions for reflection

1. According to you, what is this story about?
2. What possible themes comes out of this story?
3. Who are the main characters of this story and what do you know about each one of them?
4. Do we have women like Ruth and Naomi in our communities?
5. What are their stories?
6. How can we effectively journey with them?
7. How can we prophetically challenge socio-economic systems that keep on making widows vulnerable?
8. As a community of women and men, how can we ensure that we have kind hearted and un-abusive Boaz's that will work for gender and socio-economic justice for all?

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¹ From the response of Boaz (v.10-11), it is clear that he was old enough to be Naomi's husband but it was young Ruth who had the possibility of producing a male heir to facilitate for repossession land.
A 2010 Lenten Study compiled by the World Council of Churches, the World Student Christian Federation and the World YWCA <http://women.overcomingviolence.org>.

Worship resources: Praying for an end to Slavery

Identify Uzbekistan in the atlas or on the globe. Trace the journey Svetlana made from Uzbekistan, through Georgia to the United Arab Emirates. Put out products from Uzbekistan – maybe a cotton product or something gold. You could also put out passports, chains or padlocks to remind people of the realities of modern slavery.

Gathering Prayer

Outcast God,
Born into poverty in an occupied land,
Driven from your land as your family fled violence,
Living alongside the marginalised and the oppressed.
Dying between criminals to the jeers of the crowd,

Open our eyes, that we who seek to follow you may recognise your face in the faces of those who are enslaved.

Open our ears, that we who seek to hear your word, may recognise your love in the stories which are often drowned out.

Open our hearts, that we who seek your way of life may be bold in witnessing to your longing for justice and peace.

Amen

Candle Lighting

God of all time and space,
We light this candle as a sign of our willingness to be your light in the world.
We bring before you the people whose story we have witnessed.
We pray for all those enslaved by the greed and cruelty of others; for all whose bodies and spirits are abused and broken; for all who long for freedom.
Bless all those who work to end human trafficking, at local and international levels. Shine your bright light of justice and love on the darkest corners of our world and give us hope and courage to stand with you.

We ask it in the name of Jesus, our brother and our friend.

Amen

Psalm 10

Why, O LORD, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?

In arrogance the wicked persecute the poor — let them be caught in the schemes they have devised.

For the wicked boast of the desires of their heart, those greedy for gain curse and renounce the LORD.

In the pride of their countenance the wicked say, ‘God will not seek it out’; all their thoughts are, ‘There is no God.’

Their ways prosper at all times; your judgements are on high, out of their sight; as for their foes, they scoff at them.

They think in their heart, ‘We shall not be moved; throughout all generations we shall not meet adversity.’

Their mouths are filled with cursing and deceit and oppression; under their tongues are mischief and iniquity.

They sit in ambush in the villages; in hiding-places they murder the innocent.

Their eyes stealthily watch for the helpless; they lurk in secret like a lion in its covert; **they lurk that they may seize the poor; they seize the poor and drag them off in their net.**

They stoop, they crouch, and the helpless fall by their might.

They think in their heart, ‘God has forgotten, he has hidden his face, he will never see it.’

Rise up, O LORD; O God, lift up your hand; do not forget the oppressed.

Why do the wicked renounce God, and say in their hearts, ‘You will not call us to account’?

But you do see! Indeed you note trouble and grief, that you may take it into your hands; **the helpless commit themselves to you; you have been the helper of the orphan.**

Break the arm of the wicked and evildoers; seek out their wickedness until you find none.

The LORD is king for ever and ever; the nations shall perish from his land.

O LORD, you will hear the desire of the meek; you will strengthen their heart, you will incline your ear

to do justice for the orphan and the oppressed, so that those from earth may strike terror no more.

Reading: Ruth 3: 1-17

1 Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, 'My daughter, I need to seek some security for you, so that it may be well with you. 2 Now here is our kinsman Boaz, with whose young women you have been working. See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing-floor. 3 Now wash and anoint yourself, and put on your best clothes and go down to the threshing-floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. 4 When he lies down, observe the place where he lies; then, go and uncover his feet and lie down; and he will tell you what to do.' 5 She said to her, 'All that you tell me I will do.'

6 So she went down to the threshing-floor and did just as her mother-in-law had instructed her. 7 When Boaz had eaten and drunk, and he was in a contented mood, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she came quietly and uncovered his feet, and lay down. 8 At midnight the man was startled and turned over, and there, lying at his feet, was a woman! 9 He said, 'Who are you?' And she answered, 'I am Ruth, your servant; spread your cloak over your servant, for you are next-of-kin.' 10 He said, 'May you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter; this last instance of your loyalty is better than the first; you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich. 11 And now, my daughter, do not be afraid; I will do for you all that you ask, for all the assembly of my people know that you are a worthy woman. 12 But now, though it is true that I am a near kinsman, there is another kinsman more closely related than I. 13 Remain this night, and in the morning, if he will act as next-of-kin for you, good; let him do so. If he is not willing to act as next-of-kin for you, then, as the Lord lives, I will act as next-of-kin for you. Lie down until the morning.'

14 So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before one person could recognize another; for he said, 'It must not be known that the woman came to the threshing-floor.' 15 Then he said, 'Bring the cloak you are wearing and hold it out.' So she held it, and he measured out six measures of barley, and put it on her back; then he went into the city. 16 She came to her mother-in-law, who said, 'How did things go with you, my daughter?' Then she told her all that the man had done for her, 17 saying, 'He gave me these six measures of barley, for he said, "Do not go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed."' '

Prayers about human trafficking

O God, our words cannot express what our minds can barely comprehend and our hearts feel, when we hear of women and girls deceived and transported to unknown places for purposes of sexual exploitation and abuse because of human greed and profit. Our hearts are saddened and our spirits angry that the dignity and rights of those who are trafficked are violated through threats, deception and force.

We cry out against the degrading practice of trafficking and pray for it to end. Strengthen the fragile-spirited and broken-hearted. Make real your promises to fill these our sisters with a love that is tender and good and to send the exploiters away empty-handed. Give us the wisdom and courage to stand in solidarity with our sisters, that together we will find ways to the freedom that is your gift to all of us.

We ask through Jesus the Christ, in union with God our Creator and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Sisters of Christian Charity, Eastern Province, USA

Father,

Your Spirit told us through the mouth of Paul that the whole earth and we too, as your children, groan in the pains of a birth. It is easy, Lord, to grasp and affirm this. For there are passages so difficult and hours so filled with anguish that the image really applies; they are labour pains. Something is being born. Who knows? A world in which men and women can breathe, a more just, a more human world!

So be it.

Amen

Prayer of Dom Helder Camara, Source Holyspiritinteractive.org

Blessing

May God the creator, who danced creation into being, dance with us.

May God the redeemer, who lived for justice, live in us.

May God the sustainer, who offers hope, offer hope through us.

Amen

Video Discussion Questions

- What scenes from the film made the most impression on you? Why?
- ‘Svetlana’ has lost everything – her family, her country, her identity, her personal safety. How would you offer comfort or hope to someone in her situation?
- This film is a news report from Al-Jazeera. How much, for better and for worse, does the media influence attitudes towards women and violence within your culture?
- Human trafficking is a globalised industry, affecting every continent.
 - What are the best things about living in a globalised world?
 - What are the biggest disadvantages?
 - Do Christians, as citizens of a ‘global village’, have specific responsibilities? What are they?
- Women are often tricked into slavery by other women. How do you make sense of the relationships between victims and persecutors in the world of human trafficking?
- What, if anything, can you and your communities do to alleviate the plight of today’s slaves?