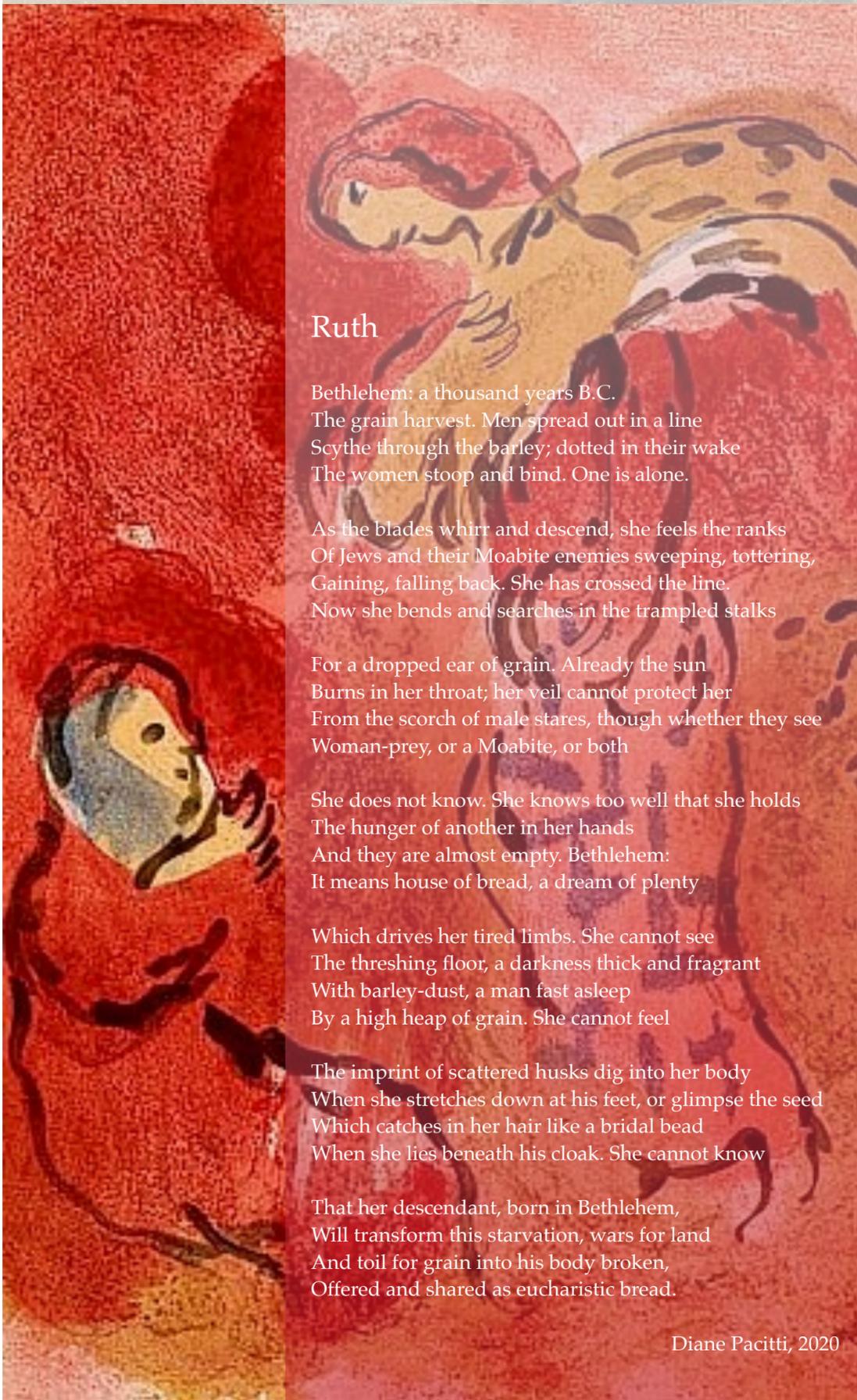


# DAILY BREAD

## “Grain of Hope : Slice of Heaven”

# GLEANNING



### Ruth

Bethlehem: a thousand years B.C.  
The grain harvest. Men spread out in a line  
Scythe through the barley; dotted in their wake  
The women stoop and bind. One is alone.

As the blades whirr and descend, she feels the ranks  
Of Jews and their Moabite enemies sweeping, tottering,  
Gaining, falling back. She has crossed the line.  
Now she bends and searches in the trampled stalks

For a dropped ear of grain. Already the sun  
Burns in her throat; her veil cannot protect her  
From the scorch of male stares, though whether they see  
Woman-prey, or a Moabite, or both

She does not know. She knows too well that she holds  
The hunger of another in her hands  
And they are almost empty. Bethlehem:  
It means house of bread, a dream of plenty

Which drives her tired limbs. She cannot see  
The threshing floor, a darkness thick and fragrant  
With barley-dust, a man fast asleep  
By a high heap of grain. She cannot feel

The imprint of scattered husks dig into her body  
When she stretches down at his feet, or glimpse the seed  
Which catches in her hair like a bridal bead  
When she lies beneath his cloak. She cannot know

That her descendant, born in Bethlehem,  
Will transform this starvation, wars for land  
And toil for grain into his body broken,  
Offered and shared as eucharistic bread.

Diane Pacitti, 2020



Middle Eastern Threshing Floor

Ruth's story is driven by access to grain. Famine drives Naomi and her family from Bethlehem to Moab, where her son Kilion marries Ruth, a Moabite woman.

Eventually things improve in Bethlehem. Naomi and Ruth, having lost their men-folk and security, return to glean the fields of Boaz, a mighty man of wealth, and contrive a marriage between him and Ruth on his threshing floor. Marriage to wealth is her route to food security.



Image above. *Ruth the Dutiful Daughter-in-Law.* William Blake. (1803)

Image left. *Ruth glaneuse (Ruth gleaning).* Marc Chagall (1960)

Grain-politics are no less acute today, and kinship matters. While one billion people go hungry every night, four companies control 90% of world grain trade. Cargill, the biggest of the four and the largest private company in the world has an annual revenue of \$120 billion. Around 100 family members own 90% of Cargill shares.<sup>1</sup> These companies are traders, not growers or farmers. They are seed, fertiliser and agrochemicals to growers, then buy the grain harvests and store them in their own facilities, thus controlling supply.

They are landowners, food processors, providers of transportation and financial services. They have been integral to the transformation of food production into a complex, globalised, financialised business. Their activities affect access to land and water, what and how much farmers grow, food prices and security, and climate change.<sup>2</sup>

Vandana Shiva, recipient of a **Right Livelihood** award (seen by many as an alternative Nobel Prize) is the founder of Navdanya, an Indian-based movement for the protection of biological and cultural diversity. Navdanya operates community seed banks to conserve and share native, climate-resilient grains, including over 200 varieties of wheat. Navdanya champions 'seed as commons' and challenges 'biopiracy' by multinationals trying to patent seed varieties.

In 2007 Vandana Shiva wrote '**Cargill and the Corporate Hijack of India's Food Agriculture**', an analysis of Indian and US policy shifts that have transformed India from second-largest wheat producer in the world to largest importer. She claims that 'centralisation has disproportionately benefited large multinationals without achieving the promised food security'.<sup>3</sup> Cargill's corporate responsibility statement says the company is 'committed to feeding India and nourishing its growing population'.<sup>4</sup> David MacLennan, CEO and President, would appear to earn around US\$700 000 annually. Navdanya's website declares itself an 'Earth-centric, Women-centric and Farmer-led movement'. So far as we know Vandana Shiva has not married anybody to ensure her own food security.

1. Investopedia. 'Cargill stock doesn't exist. Here's Why.'

2. Oxfam research report 'CEREAL SECRETS: The world's largest grain traders and global agriculture'

3. <https://navdanya.org/site/#>

4. <https://indiacs.in/cargill-working-to-feed-india/>



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