

ORDER OF SERVICE

SONG - Everyone needs compassion

Reading: Ruth 2: 1-23

Talk

Prayers

SONG - Love Divine

PRAYERS:

Ever-present God,
most of us will never have to decide whether or not we should flee our home.
For this we are truly thankful.
Whether it is war, oppression, religious persecution or other fears,
we commit those children and families who have chosen the journey of a
refugee into your hands.

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refugee into your hands.

Their journey is dangerous,
the road they walk is treacherous
and their destination is not guaranteed. At the end of their journey,
we pray 'they 'become one of 'us'.

Giver of new life,
thank you that we are a new creation
and that your graces are new every morning.
We lift up children who are setting foot in our country for the first time today.
May they experience warmth, welcome and love.

Anything new is full of opportunities and uncertainties,
Loving God, we pray child refugees 'uncertainties be stilled and the
opportunities our nation can offer become apparent.
In this, we are particularly mindful of children arriving on their own.
Lord, for those who arrive in our community, let us play our part in answering
our prayer.

Lord,

Help us to receive your unconditional love, help us to accept the gift you give.
But do not allow us to keep it to ourselves.

Challenge us to share your love.

Give us opportunities to welcome those who do not fit in,

Create spaces for us to love those in need as you would,

Encourage us to bring your loving kindness to those who suffer and struggle,

Help us to represent you in our homes, in our families, in our towns and communities.

Show us how to follow your example and bring love to all we meet.

TALK:

The book of Ruth is a love story from beginning to end. In the first chapter we read about Ruth's love and devotion for her mother-in-law, Naomi, and then in this second chapter we read about Boaz meeting Ruth.

Boaz and Ruth is a romantic love story but it's also a story of love that saves a family. Boaz becomes Ruth's Kinsman Redeemer - not a concept we have to today but this story takes place in barbaric times. This was the time of the Judges, full of war and bloodshed - you needed to be part of a community or tribe to stay safe. It was an incredibly dangerous world to live in on your own, especially for women.

So the Jewish people had laws to make sure people were properly cared for and that no-one was left abandoned and alone. So the law said that should a man die and leave a widow with no sons then it was his nearest male relative's responsibility to marry the widow, take care of her and have a son with her. That way the dead man's possessions and land would be inherited by this son, the land would stay under the family name and the family name would not disappear. The Kinsman had to be willing - not just to marry to widow but also take on his wife's family pass his inheritance onto their son.

When Ruth first arrives Boaz has a choice to make - he could be selfish and ignore her, keep his options open and play the field. And the likelihood is that as they're in Naomi's ancestral home that there would actually have been a whole bunch of men who were related to Naomi and so could have taken on the responsibility of Kinsman Redeemer. But we only here about Boaz, so presumably the other do try to avoid this foreign immigrant woman who's come to steal their inheritances!

Boaz makes the other choice, the choice of love, and immediately begins to start helping her with work and extra food. He expects nothing in return for these gifts, he is just acting out of love. This isn't a romantic situation - it's a man taking responsibility caring for someone in need. Boaz has nothing to gain here - as a wealthy landowner there would have been plenty of rich families wanting to offer him a wife, so it's not about chasing Ruth because he

fancies her. He can't gain financially from her hard work, if anything she is a burden as it's two more mouths to feed. However Boaz never asks for anything from Ruth or Naomi, he simply gives them opportunities to be part of the community and loves them as his family. Boaz's love for them is without condition.

Unconditional Love

Boaz is a picture for us of what real love is. Not something to be earned but an unconditional gift to be received.

In 1 John 4:9-10 we read about this kind of love - it says this: " God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.

Boaz is a picture of how love might work in human relationships but John shows us the ultimate picture of love in what God does for us.

“God showed how much he loved us”

It starts then with God loving us, why did God create the world? So he could love it!

Why did God create you? – Same reason!

God has loved us since long before we born

Psalm 139 “ *–You made all the delicate inner parts of my body, and knit me together in my mother's womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvellous how well I know it. You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book, every moment was laid out before a single day has passed.*”

God knows you and loves you, not because of anything you've done or achieved or what you look like or how cool you are. God loves you because you are you, there are literally no conditions. He loves you no matter where your life ends up, whether you go to church or not, God loves you.

God loves us so much that he gives us the freedom to live our lives however we want. We can choose what we do with our existence, we can do whatever we want and he will still love us. Now God designed us and knows the best way to live, but loves us enough to give us the freedom to choose whether to live that way or not.

Most people choose not to live under God's rule, they rebel against God and live selfishly for themselves – this is what Sin is; not living God's way.

And this is how we know that God loves us; because he has a choice here. He can choose to give up on all the people who turn against him, to turn his back on the world. But he doesn't do that.

“by sending his one and only Son into the world”

God loves us enough to do something about the problem of sin. He doesn't simply give up on people, even though people have given up on him. Instead he chooses to get involved, to step in and make a difference.

He sends his only son to live amongst all the sinful people (and if we think of God as a good father, then giving up his only son is a hugely painful and difficult thing for him to do.) In fact, it's even more than that because Jesus is actually God, so he's not just a father giving up his son – he is the son. He is giving up himself for his people.

He comes from perfect, wonderful heaven and into a world of pain and suffering to live like we do. Unlike everybody else Jesus never sinned, he never turned against God. Not when his life was hard, not when he was chased out of his home town, not when his friends abandoned him, not when he was lied about, not when he was beaten and whipped, not even when he was executed for crimes he did not commit. He never sinned but still took the ultimate punishment of an excruciating death.

Does anyone know what excruciating means? (Extremely painful) Anyone know where the word comes from? It's actually all from crucifixion – ex cruciate – the cross – it's the most painful way to die so painful that the word about it is still in use 2000 years later! Why did he have to suffer like this?

“so that we might have eternal life through him”

Jesus died to deal with the problem of sin, he died to take away sin so that people can have life with God.

The only way to share life with God is to be free from sin, to be absolutely perfect, to be holy. Holy means to have no sin in your life. If you are not holy then you cannot share in life with God.

What does it mean to be perfect? It means nothing less than having 100%, it's not like getting an A* in an exam, sometimes that can be as low as 80% - it means getting every question totally correct, full marks, no errors, no mistakes. 100% absolutely perfection. It's an impossible standard!

So how can we be holy? We can't live perfect lives, we all make mistakes, sometimes we all say or do something we regret, we all make bad and selfish choices. We cannot do it on our own, we will never be holy because of sin.

Jesus is the only person who has ever lived who did not sin, the only perfect person and the only person who's life actually enables them to be holy, enables them to come close to God.

Jesus chose to give up what he had, to give up his perfection and be punished for the sins of others. Rather than letting us face death for rebelling against God, he took that punishment that we deserve. We are all sinful people, none of us are deserving of life with a perfect, holy God but through ' Jesus death on the cross we are able to have that.

And what do you need to do share in life with God? You don't need to be crucified, you don't need to be nice to everyone all the time, you don't need to follow all the rules - in fact, you don't actually have to do anything.

Because God's love is a gift, freely given to you. And to all people. Jesus died so that you can live, he died to give you the gift of eternal life with God. And gifts aren't earned, you don't work to achieve a birthday present – it is something given to you because the giver loves you – you just accept it and say thanks. This gift is no different, Jesus loves you, and all you need to do is accept it. That's it, just accept it.

“This is real love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us”

Love was created by God, the world exists because of Love, all love comes from him. His love for us is real Agape love, love without conditions, love that we don't deserve and cannot earn. He loves you no matter what.

Being a Christian is not about showing how much we love God through things we do it's about showing how much God loves us, and doing the things God wants us to do because we're so thankful that he loves us.

We follow Jesus because he loves us and when we accept his love it changes us. We can be free from guilt and shame, we can be free to live our lives differently than society tells us we should, we are free to follow Jesus and live for him because we want to, because his love is always there, no matter what, we can always rely on him to be there for us. And because he loves us we can have confidence, we can have hope, we can have joy, we can have life.

Unconditional love

So what do we do now? God loves you unconditionally, however you choose to live your life, whatever you do, wherever you end up, whether you are successful academically or not, whether you feel beautiful or not, whether you are wealthy or not, whether you have all the coolest possessions or not; he still loves you. Even if you don't love him, don't even think about him, or even go around telling everyone he doesn't exist and that they are foolish for

believing in him, God still loves you, and he loves you more than you can ever imagine.

In there passage from Ruth we saw how Boaz's unconditional love transformed Ruth & Naomi's lives - they arrived as unwanted strangers, poor foreigners with nothing to offer but through acts of love they found a home and place to belong, they found the freedom to live full lives. And with Jesus the same is true for us; through his acts of love we find freedom and a place to belong and life in all it's fullness.