

Worship @ Home

Sunday 28th June 2020

Bible Month: Ruth

Worship Leader: Revd Val Reid

Reader: Helen Hofton

Music: Tom Nichol

Christchurch Community Moment:

Katherine Harris with Sara Crowley

Technician: Tony Edmonds



'Ruth and Naomi' Adi Nes 2007

Call to worship

We are all part of the rhythm of life:

We are born

We give birth

We live in relationships

We search for meaning

We make choices

We die

We suffer the loss of those we love.

As we celebrate this day of the journey

Peace be with you.

Welcome

Opening hymn/song

Light of the world

You stepped down into darkness

Opened my eyes, let me see

Beauty that made this heart adore You

Hope of a life spent with You

Here I am to worship

Here I am to bow down

Here I am to say that You're my God

You're altogether lovely
Altogether worthy
Altogether wonderful to me

King of all days
Oh so highly exalted
Glorious in heaven above
Humbly You came to the earth You created
All for love's sake became poor

Here I am to worship...

I'll never know how much it cost
To see my sin upon that cross...

Tim Hughes, Hillsong Worship

Let us pray...

In your image we are made, creator God
Male and female
Young and old
We are your creation

You took on our life, Jesus Christ
We find you here
In truth and grace within ourselves

You lead us on, Holy Spirit
In golden threads of life
In pain and joy

Thanks be to God
Amen.

Ruth Chapter 4 (The Message)

Boaz went straight to the public square and took his place there. Before long the “closer relative,” the one mentioned earlier by Boaz, strolled by.

“Step aside, old friend,” said Boaz. “Take a seat.” The man sat down.

² Boaz then gathered ten of the town elders together and said, “Sit down here with us; we’ve got some business to take care of.” And they sat down.

³⁻⁴ Boaz then said to his relative, “The piece of property that belonged to our relative Elimelech is being sold by his widow Naomi, who has just returned from the country of Moab. I thought you ought to know about it.

Buy it back if you want it—you can make it official in the presence of those sitting here and before the town elders. You have first redeemer rights. If you don't want it, tell me so I'll know where I stand. You're first in line to do this and I'm next after you."

He said, "I'll buy it."

⁵ Then Boaz added, "You realize, don't you, that when you buy the field from Naomi, you also get Ruth the Moabite, the widow of our dead relative, along with the redeemer responsibility to have children with her to carry on the family inheritance."

⁶ Then the relative said, "Oh, I can't do that—I'd jeopardize my own family's inheritance. You go ahead and buy it—you can have my rights—I can't do it."

⁷ In the olden times in Israel, this is how they handled official business regarding matters of property and inheritance: a man would take off his shoe and give it to the other person. This was the same as an official seal or personal signature in Israel.

⁸ So when Boaz's "redeemer" relative said, "Go ahead and buy it," he signed the deal by pulling off his shoe.

⁹⁻¹⁰ Boaz then addressed the elders and all the people in the town square that day: "You are witnesses today that I have bought from Naomi everything that belonged to Elimelech and Kilion and Mahlon, including responsibility for Ruth the foreigner, the widow of Mahlon—I'll take her as my wife and keep the name of the deceased alive along with his inheritance. The memory and reputation of the deceased is not going to disappear out of this family or from his hometown. To all this you are witnesses this very day."

¹¹⁻¹² All the people in the town square that day, backing up the elders, said, "Yes, we are witnesses. May GOD make this woman who is coming into your household like Rachel and Leah, the two women who built the family of Israel. May GOD make you a pillar in Ephrathah and famous in Bethlehem! With the children GOD gives you from this young woman, may your family rival the family of Perez, the son Tamar bore to Judah."

¹³ Boaz married Ruth. She became his wife. Boaz slept with her. By GOD's gracious gift she conceived and had a son.

¹⁴⁻¹⁵ The town women said to Naomi, "Blessed be GOD! He didn't leave you without family to carry on your life. May this baby grow up to be famous in Israel! He'll make you young again! He'll take care of you in old age. And this daughter-in-law who has brought him into the world and loves you so much, why, she's worth more to you than seven sons!"

¹⁶ Naomi took the baby and held him in her arms, cuddling him, cooing over him, waiting on him hand and foot.

¹⁷ The neighborhood women started calling him "Naomi's baby boy!" But his real name was Obed. Obed was the father of Jesse, and Jesse the father of David.

¹⁸⁻²² This is the family tree of Perez:

Perez had Hezron,

Hezron had Ram,

Ram had Amminadab,

Amminadab had Nahshon,

Nahshon had Salmon,

Salmon had Boaz,

Boaz had Obed,

Obed had Jesse,

and Jesse had David.

Reflection

Once upon a time there was a beautiful girl.
She was imprisoned in a tall tower by an evil witch.
Or she was mistreated by her wicked stepmother.
Or she pricked her finger on a spindle, and fell asleep for a hundred years.
Despite all her trials, a handsome prince fell in love with her.
Rescued her from the tower – or the kitchen – or the enchanted castle.
They got married.
And they lived happily ever after.
The end.

You can read the book of Ruth like a fairy tale.
Or like a Barbara Cartland romance.
At our circuit Bible Study on Friday, someone even suggested Jane Austen.
It is a truth universally acknowledged that a that a single man in possession of a good fortune, must be in want of a wife.
Boaz – you're Mr Darcy!

Christopher Booker, in his interpretation of Jungian archetypes, claims that there are only seven plots in the world.

Every story ever told, every novel ever written, every film ever made, is a version of one of these stories:

1. Overcoming the Monster
2. Rags to Riches
3. The Quest
4. Voyage and Return
5. Comedy
6. Tragedy
7. Rebirth

Actually, I think the story of Ruth incorporates all seven of these.

But we'll come to that later...

But for me, the meaning is in the detail.

This isn't just boy meets girl.

Although it ends with a marriage and a with a birth, I'm not sure that 'happy ever after' is really possible.

Naomi has lost her husband, and both of her sons.

She has travelled as a refugee to a foreign land.

She has come home, humiliatingly begging for favours from her old community.

She owns land – but as a woman in a patriarchal society she can't claim it or farm it.

How many refugees today are separated from their homes, their land, their old way of life?

Dependent on the charity of others, where once they earned their own living?

Ruth has remained loyal to her mother-in-law.

She survives – just – by gleaning at the edges of the fields during the barley harvest.

It's a precarious way of life.

The writer makes it clear that girls living in this way are at risk of sexual harassment from the men of the village.

And where will she find food when the harvest is over?

How many people in the world today live at subsistence level, never knowing where their next meal will come from?

Naomi and Ruth buy their security through a mixture of sex and manipulation.

Naomi dresses Ruth up and sends her off to the harvest supper to seduce Boaz.

How many women survive at the edges of society today by selling their bodies?

Too many.

This little book, just four chapters long, deals with some dark stuff.

True over two thousand years ago.

Still true today.

So why was it written?

Is there a happy ending?

If so, what is it?

The book is set during the time of Judges.

A difficult, violent, lawless time for the people of Israel.

But it was written much later.

After the exile in Babylon.

When the people were allowed to come home to Israel, and were working out what their identity might be as they rebuilt Jerusalem, and rebuilt their community.

This was the time of the reforms of King Josiah.

Josiah claimed to 'find' a copy of the Torah in the walls of the ruined temple.

If the people were to rediscover what it meant to be Yahweh's chosen people, then they would need to keep these laws strictly.

The laws were about reclaiming their identity.

And identity was expressed by being separate.

Only eating certain foods.

Only wearing certain fabrics.

Only marrying certain women.

Those who had married foreigners while in exile in Babylon – they should send them home.

The tribe would prosper, God would approve of his people, if they kept themselves separate.

Closed the borders.

Prioritised the purity of the race.

Into this mindset, someone rather subversive dropped the little book of Ruth.

Many scholars think it's the only book in the Bible written by a woman.

I wouldn't be surprised!

In this book the chosen people are – mostly – a bit unlikeable.

They live in a deeply unequal society.

They do the minimum required by law to support those in poverty.

Women are not safe in their fields.

The heroine is a foreigner.

And not just any old foreigner – a Moabite.

The old enemy of Israel.

Because they didn't offer the people sanctuary as they were escaping from Egypt, back in the days of Moses:

You shall never promote their welfare or their prosperity as long as you live.

The chosen people can bear a grudge for a long time.

The writer loses no opportunity to remind us that Ruth is a foreigner.

A moabitess.

Her nearest relative wants Naomi's land, but not if it means he has to marry one of *them*.

And she is a woman.

Women who were thought of as the property of men.

Who don't have a public role or a voice or a vote.

Yet Ruth – who is an outsider in every possible way – is the one who lives out of *hesed* – God's covenant love.

She is the one who works hard to feed her family.

She is the mother of Obed.

She is the great-grandmother of King David, the archetypal king of Israel.

Far down the line, she is an ancestor of Jesus himself, as Matthew reminds us at the start of his gospel.

So Ruth goes on a journey from rags to riches.

She goes on a quest to find where she truly belongs.

Her story includes both the tragedy of famine and loss and death, and the comedy of a happy ever after ending.

It ends with a birth, which heralds a new future.

But it's not just about one woman.

It's a story about a whole community.

The monsters to be overcome?

Selfish isolationism. Prejudice. Exclusion. Narrowminded adherence to rules.

What is born at the end of the book is the hope of a new way of doing community.

Where everybody is welcome.

Where God is faithful not just to one tribe, but to each and every person in the whole world.

This is the quest of the people of Israel across the generations – to understand the wideness of God's mercy.

To create a new way of being there for each other.

No wonder Matthew gives us a genealogy which includes Ruth – and whole load of other oddballs and misfits.

This is the story our saviour comes from.

And the story he will live out in his life and ministry.

Amen.

Prayer of confession

We had a dream about families, O God
It looked like many lights
From a great stream of people
Generation after generation
Adding to each other's light
Warming each other's life
Setting each other free
Across the boundaries
Of all our differences
Creating in between
The brave and gracious light
Of human community.

We are remembering
How far we are from that dream.

O God, so often it is the small things that defeat us
The lid off the toothpaste
The bathmat in a heap
The last grizzle from somebody
A thoughtless word
Or no word at all...
Another gift taken for granted.
These small things build upon each other, God
And when our energy is low
And our hurts are high
They take from our life.
It is often hard to live as families,
Lord have mercy.

Silence

Hear the word of grace in Jesus Christ
The love of God for us never fails
Nothing can separate us from that love
A new dream is always ours.
Rise up and live in freedom and faith.
Amen.

Hymn

Brother, sister, let me serve you;
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant too.

We are pilgrims on a journey,
and companions on the road;
we are here to help each other
walk the mile and bear the load.

I will hold the Christlight for you
in the night time of your fear;
I will hold my hand out to you,
speak the peace you long to hear.

I will weep when you are weeping;
when you laugh, I'll laugh with you;
I will share your joy and sorrow,
till we've seen this journey through.

When we sing to God in heaven,
we shall find such harmony,
born of all we've known together
of Christ's love and agony.

Brother, sister, let me serve you;
let me be as Christ to you;
pray that I may have the grace to
let you be my servant too.

Richard Gillard

Christchurch Community Moment

Katherine Harris talks with Sara Crowley about Life in Lockdown

Prayers for ourselves and others

At our first Christchurch consultation on Zoom this week, we began with prayer.

Alison shared with us a picture she was given as we prayed.

A picture of Christchurch as *a place of gathering into the loving arms of the Father for comfort, healing, connection, reconnection.*

On the same day, the Archbishop of Canterbury wrote on his blog about the possibility of churches re-opening for worship:

As we prepare to gather together again, we do so knowing that many will be returning bearing new burdens of grief and anxiety.

Others will be filled with hope and excitement.

But we do not gather just by ourselves.

We are gathered in the embrace of God who holds our griefs, fears and hopes, and who walks with us into this new and uncertain future, lighting our path along the way.

I am encouraged that God speaks to her people through archbishops, and through us!

So as we pray this morning, I invite you to use this image of a people gathered into God's loving arms.

We have so missed hugging and being hugged.

As lockdown eases, the time will come when we will gather those we love into a warm embrace.

But not quite yet...

So as we pray for people this morning, you might want to wrap your arms around yourself, holding yourself – and those we pray for – in a big virtual hug.

We hold in God's loving embrace:

- Sara Crowley, and her research team at UCL. We pray for wisdom, insight, collegiality.
- Those who still struggle with inequality at work - whether because of their gender, their colour, or their sexual orientation.
- Sara's family – Mike, Alice and Matt.
- All those who, like Alice and Matt, who have lost out because this year has not been what they expected.
- All those who had hoped for a happy ever after ending, and have been disappointed.

And so we pray, knowing that many are bearing new burdens of grief and anxiety.

Others are filled with hope and excitement.

But our prayer binds us into a vast community of love.

We are gathered in the embrace of God who holds our griefs, fears and hopes, and who walks with us into this new and uncertain future, lighting our path along the way.

Amen.

Lord's prayer

Blessing

God go with you into this day

Christ Jesus walk before you

And the Spirit be a cloud of grace

Amen

*Some prayers are from
'Echoes of our Journey; Liturgies of the People'
by Dorothy McRae McMahon
CCL 7011*