

Worship @ Home

Sunday 7th June 2020

Bible Month: Ruth

Worship Leader: Revd Val Reid

Reader: Pauline Davis

Music: Steve and Caroline Cook

Christchurch Community Moment:

Katherine Harris with Andy Feltoe

Technician: John Hamblin



'Ruth and Naomi' Adi Nes 2006

Call to worship

O God, you summon the day to dawn
You teach the morning to waken the earth
For you the valleys shall sing for joy
The trees of the fields shall clap their hands
For you the kings of the earth shall bow
The poor and persecuted shall shout for joy
Your love and mercy shall last forever
Fresh as the morning, sure as the sunrise.

Come and worship the God of all creation.

Welcome

June is Bible Month.

Today, and for the rest of June, we will be exploring the book of Ruth.

It's a book which was written at a time of national disquiet, to remind God's people that God is always at work.

In the most surprising ways.

And through the most unexpected people.

Prepare to be comforted and disturbed!

Come – now is the time to worship (StF 24)

Come, now is the time to worship
Come, now is the time to give your heart
Come, just as you are to worship
Come, just as you are before your God
Come

One day every tongue will confess You are God
One day every knee will bow
Still the greatest treasure remains for those
Who gladly choose you now

Come, now is the time to worship...

Brian Robert Doerksen

Let us pray...

We have heard about you
God of all power.
You made the world out of kindness,
Creating order out of confusion;
You made each one of us in your own image;
Your fingerprint is on every soul.
So we praise you.

We have heard about you
Jesus Christ.
The carpenter who left his tools and trade;
The poor man who made others rich;
The healer who let himself be wounded;
The criminal on whom the soldiers spat
Not knowing they were fouling the face of God;
The saviour who died and rose again.
So we praise you.

We have heard about you,
Holy Spirit.
You broke the bonds of race and nation,
To let God speak in every tongue;
You made disciples drunk with grace;
You converted souls and emptied pockets;
You showed how love made all things new
And opened the doors to change and freedom.
So we praise you.

We have heard about you,
God, three-in-one.
And you, the Lord of all,
Have heard about us...
But not through second-hand reports,
Not from the tales that others tell.
You have put your ear to our heart
Both when we prayed and when we doubted.

You know well what we fear and what we question
What we long for
And from whom we turn away.
And even when we become deaf to you
You never stop listening for us.
In silence
In penitence
And in confidence
We do not repeat what you know already.
We ask to be made whole.
Lord have mercy.

Silence

God is good.
On all whose lives are open to change
From guilt to grace
From darkness to light
God pronounces her pardon
And grants his peace. Amen.

Ruth Chapter 1 (The Message)

First reading

¹⁻² Once upon a time—it was back in the days when judges led Israel— there was a famine in the land. A man from Bethlehem in Judah left home to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and his two sons. The man's name was Elimelech; his wife's name was Naomi; his sons were named Mahlon and Kilion—all Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They all went to the country of Moab and settled there.

³⁻⁵ Elimelech died and Naomi was left, she and her two sons. The sons took Moabite wives; the name of the first was Orpah, the second Ruth.

They lived there in Moab for the next ten years. But then the two brothers, Mahlon and Kilion, died. Now the woman was left without either her young men or her husband.

⁶⁻⁷ One day she got herself together, she and her two daughters-in-law, to leave the country of Moab and set out for home; she had heard that GOD had been pleased to visit his people and give them food. And so she started out from the place she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law with her, on the road back to the land of Judah.

First reflection: Orpah

On the road back to the land of Judah.
Only it's not 'back' for me.
It's a foreign land.
I know my husband came from Bethlehem.
And my mother-in-law.
But it's not my town. Not my land.
They are not my people.
My people are here in Moab.
My gods are here.

And I know what they think of us Moabites, there in Judah.
We're foreigners.
We look different.
We speak different.
We are the enemy.
They hate us.
They are afraid of us.

It's an old story.
An old story that I lived out in my marriage.
Whenever things went wrong – whenever we disagreed – whenever I wanted to be myself, Orpah, not just a wife –
then he'd quote his scriptures to me.

*No Moabite shall be admitted to the assembly of the LORD.
Ever to the tenth generation.
Because they did not meet you with food and water on your journey out of Egypt.
You shall never promote their welfare or their prosperity as long as you live.*

So I should be grateful.
Grateful for what I had.
Grateful for what he deigned to give me.
I should shut up and keep quiet.

How dare he!
What right did he have to assume that he mattered more.
That coming from Judah gave him the right to lord it over me.
That I was a second class citizen.
In my own land.
A Moabite.
And a woman.

So on the road to Judah with Naomi and Ruth – I am afraid.
Afraid of how things will be in this other place.
Afraid for my safety.
Afraid for my life.
I will always be the other.
The foreigner.
The stranger.
The outsider.
Everything will be a risk.
There may be food in the house of bread.
But will there be a place for me and my own identity?

Moabite lives matter.

But not in Judah.

Second reading

⁸⁻⁹ After a short while on the road, Naomi told her two daughters-in-law, “Go back. Go home and live with your mothers. And may GOD treat you as graciously as you treated your deceased husbands and me. May GOD give each of you a new home and a new husband!” She kissed them and they cried openly.

¹⁰ They said, “No, we’re going on with you to your people.”

¹¹⁻¹³ But Naomi was firm: “Go back, my dear daughters. Why would you come with me? Do you suppose I still have sons in my womb who can become your future husbands? Go back, dear daughters—on your way, please! I’m too old to get a husband. Why, even if I said, ‘There’s still hope!’ and this very night got a man and had sons, can you imagine being satisfied to wait until they were grown? Would you wait that long to get married again? No, dear daughters; this is a bitter pill for me to swallow—more bitter for me than for you. GOD has dealt me a hard blow.”

¹⁴ Again they cried openly. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye; but Ruth embraced her and held on.

¹⁵ Naomi said, “Look, your sister-in-law is going back home to live with her own people and gods; go with her.”

¹⁶⁻¹⁷ But Ruth said, “Don’t force me to leave you; don’t make me go home. Where you go, I go; and where you live, I’ll live. Your people are my people, your God is my god; where you die, I’ll die, and that’s where I’ll be buried, so help me GOD—not even death itself is going to come between us!”

¹⁸⁻¹⁹ When Naomi saw that Ruth had her heart set on going with her, she gave in. And so the two of them travelled on together to Bethlehem.

Second reflection: Ruth

Hesed.

Faithful loving-kindness.

That’s the one thing I remember from what he tried to teach me.

Stories of home.

Stories of Yahweh.

The God of his own tribe.

The God he left behind when his family fled famine.

Came here as refugees.

Made a life in a new country.

Ruth, he said, our God is faithful.

It can’t have been easy.

Moab and Israel are not exactly on good terms.

So why come here?

To this foreign place.

To this despised community?

Why do refugees go anywhere?

Because they are desperate.

Because to stay is a greater risk.

Because the only hope of survival is doing the most dangerous thing.

And despite what his people say about us, we’re just people.

Families like theirs.

Communities like theirs.

Feast and famine – just like their own land.

Men and women – love and sex and marriage and companionship and arguments – just like anywhere.

We’re all human beings.

I think he learned that, in our ten years together.
And I learned it too.
I learned to love his difference.
As he loved mine.
I learned to love Naomi, my mother-in-law.
She'd had a tough life.
Her resilience was astonishing.
Every time she fell, she found a way to stand up again.

But now – after she had lost country, husband, sons – now, I understood why she wanted to go home.
To end her days in Bethlehem.
The house of bread.
Not just for the food.
There are other ways to be fed.
She needed soul food.

She yearned to belong again.

So where do I belong, now?
Here in my own country?
Or with Naomi, my kinswoman and my friend?

I long to wipe away her tears.
To make her whole again.
To solve her problems.
To make it better – as she has made it better for me so many times over the years.
But I can't.
There is nothing I can do to make it better.
Nothing I can say that will ease the pain of losing husband, sons, home.
All I can do is be there.
Accompany her wherever she goes.
Share the journey.
Be faithful.
Faithful loving kindness.

So she knows she is not alone.
Never alone again.

Third reading

When they arrived in Bethlehem the whole town was soon buzzing: "Is this really our Naomi? And after all this time!"

²⁰⁻²¹ But she said, "Don't call me Naomi; call me Bitter. The Strong One has dealt me a bitter blow. I left here full of life, and GOD has brought me back with nothing but the clothes on my back. Why would you call me Naomi? God certainly doesn't. The Strong One ruined me."

²² And so Naomi was back, and Ruth the foreigner with her, back from the country of Moab. They arrived in Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

Third reflection: Naomi

Don't call me Naomi.

Call me bitter.

I have lost everything I loved.

My husband.

My sons.

What have I done to deserve this?

Is it some kind of divine punishment?

I've only ever done what was right for my family.

I've made sacrifices.

I've travelled long miles.

I've known what it is to be hungry.

To be scared.

To be completely uncertain about the future.

I've made a home for them in a foreign land.

I've wiped their tears.

I've accepted their foreign wives.

What more could I have done?

And now this.

Going home with nothing.

No family.

No money.

No land.

Having to beg for favours.

I hate that.

I like to be the one who helps others.

Not the one who needs help.

No wonder I am bitter.

Yes, God ruined me.

God has forgotten me.

God doesn't even know my name.

So here I am.

Back home.

In the House of Bread.

Ironically.

With nothing.

Well – I have my foreign daughter-in-law.

Ruth.

The Moabitess.

What use is she going to be?

Moabites are not welcome here.

But perhaps – just saying all this.
Just telling the truth.
Letting God know how I feel.
Without pretending everything is OK....

Yes perhaps that has helped.

And it's the beginning of the barley harvest.
Perhaps Ruth can go and glean.
Perhaps she'll bring back a few scraps to keep body and soul together.

Perhaps I was right to let her come with me after all.

Hymn

Our next hymn is about finding God in some of the dark places of our lives.
Andrew Brown writes that this hymn “was written to counter the idea that God always brings light”, and was particularly inspired by this verse from Psalm 18:
*He made darkness his hiding place;
his tent was in a circle about him,
dark water in clouds of air.*

When life is shaken to its core,
when clouds and storms arrive,
we find it difficult to know
God present in our lives.

Yet there's no misery or grief,
pain, doubt, or emptiness,
that is not known by the divine
and filled with tenderness.

When we are tempted to give up,
and purpose drains away,
where is the God of hope and joy?
Can peace replace dismay?

God, in the centre of our pain,
makes of our dark a tent,
a holy place of tearfulness
as life splits and fragments.

We need to learn to trust and know
God in our lives, God here
hidden within the clouds and storms,
one with our doubts and fears.

This is our peace: that in the depths
of our adversities
we find a God who shares our pain
and life's cruel miseries.

Words: © Andrew Brown (November 2019, rev. March 2020)

Tune: Amazing Grace (StF 440)

Christchurch Community Moment

Katherine Harris talks with Andy Feltoe about Life in Lockdown

Prayers for ourselves and others

*When our Friends the Quakers pray for themselves and for others,
They talk of 'holding in the light'.
They don't use words.
They don't use postures.
They simply hold each person or situation in the light.*

Andrew Brown's hymn invites us to think of the dark as a place of healing.

*God, in the centre of our pain,
makes of our dark a tent...*

*And so this morning I invite you to choose which feels like a holy space for you.
To hold these people and places and situations in the light – or in the dark:*

Andy, Lizzie, Ben and Iris...

All parents who are balancing work and home-schooling and stress and hope...

All refugees in foreign countries, who feel unknown or unloved or uncared for...

All people who because of their nationality or background or the colour of their skin feel unsafe...

All people who are angry at injustice, and struggle to find a voice...

All people who have lost loved ones and can only lament...

*Holy God,
You have declared that your Kingdom is among us.
Open our eyes to see it,
Our ears to hear it,
Our hearts to hold it,
Our hands to serve it.
This we pray in Jesus' name.
Amen.*

Lord's prayer

I invite you now to say the Lord's prayer out loud.

Use whichever version you are familiar with.

Use whichever language feels like your mother tongue.

Although we are apart, we join together in praying the prayer that Jesus gave us.

Our Father in heaven,
hallowed be your name,
your kingdom come,
your will be done,
on earth as in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread.
Forgive us our sins
as we forgive those who sin against us.
Lead us not into temptation
but deliver us from evil.
For the kingdom, the power,
and the glory are yours
now and for ever.
Amen.

Blessing

For all that God can do within us
For all that God can do without us
For all in whom Christ lived before us
For all in whom Christ lives beside us
For all the Spirit wants to bring us
For where the Spirit wants to send us
Thanks be to God.

Listen!
Christ has promised to be with us in the world
As in our worship.
We go to meet him...
Amen.

Playing out Music...

*Some prayers are from 'A Wee Worship Book' – Wild Goose Worship Group 1989
CCL 7011*