

Christchurch Virtual Worship Service
21st June 2020

Order of Service

- ✚ Welcome and Prayers
- ✚ Hymn – StF 343 ‘All my days...’
- ✚ Bible Reading Ruth Ch 3 (from The Message if possible)
- ✚ Reflection
- ✚ Hymn – StF 633 ‘My soul finds rest...’
- ✚ Christchurch Community Moment
- ✚ Prayers and Blessing
- ✚ Hymn – StF 455 ‘All my hope on God...’

Welcome

Good morning and welcome to this act of worship. My name is Helen Dearn and I am a Local Preacher in the North Herts Methodist Circuit and a member of Christchurch, Hitchin. Today Mike is providing our music, David is reading the Bible passage and John is working his technical magic behind the scenes. So, huge thanks to them and also to Katherine and Grahame who will share in the Christchurch Community Moment later on.

But, first, let us come before God in prayer – offering up our praise and thanksgiving, but also taking time to say sorry as well. Let us pray:

Loving God,
We come into Your presence in the sure and certain hope
That You know us, You love us and You forever hold out Your hand
To guide us through the twists and turns of life.
And so we bring You our praise and adoration
As we put our trust in You
Father, Mother God.

Yet, we know we don't always live that life
Of trust and hope.
We go our own way and in so doing
We hurt others and we hurt You.
So, in a quiet moment we say sorry (*pause*)
You promised to forgive us when we are truly sorry
Help us to rest once more in that sure and certain hope
Mother, Father God.

And so, we bring You our heartfelt thanks.
Thank You for never letting us go,
Thank You for all the gifts of your creation,
Which includes the gift of each other.
Thank You for the gift of Jesus our Lord and Saviour,

And of the Holy Spirit, our Advocate and Comforter.
Build us up to be a people of praise and hope
As we strive to be Your witnesses in this world
And rest in You
Father, Mother God.

And now I invite you all to join together in saying out loud the Lord's Prayer. Please use which ever version you prefer and even whichever language is the one you are most comfortable using.

Our Father...

Hymn - StF 343 'All my days...'

Bible Reading

Over the month of June we have been looking at the Book of Ruth. David is now going to read Chapter 3 for us – Ruth and Boaz at the Threshing Floor.

Reflection

Last week Tom reflected upon the unconditional love of God that shines out in Chapter 2 of the Book of Ruth. This week I want to focus on the sure and steadfast hope that God promises to each and every one of us when we put our trust in him... or her.

Chapter One of Ruth is a tale of endings and losses, of despair and bitterness, and of a lack of hope in the future. Naomi and Ruth have returned to Naomi's family home, but they have very little to sustain and support themselves. Much of Chapter 2 is focused on Ruth providing food for them both, aided by the care and concern of Boaz – a kinsman of Naomi. Then, in Chapter 3 we see hope begin to blossom; hope that the future might be brighter than first thought, and that God will indeed use all circumstances for his good and wonderful purposes.

There is so much in the chapter that could be unpacked, but I want to just focus on 2 points this morning. Firstly, the place of this coming together of Ruth and Boaz, the threshing floor, is a highly significant place in Jewish scripture. The threshing floor was a large open and levelled-off place where the grain was separated from the chaff, with the chaff (the waste) being blown away on the wind. As such it became a symbol of judgement where good and evil are separated, as well as being the place that was bought by David from Araunah the Jebusite so David could build an altar in repentance for his own disobedience to God's will. And, it was this threshing ground where Solomon would go on to build the Temple – the place where God's presence would reside in the Holy of Holies.

So, the fact that Ruth comes to Boaz at the threshing floor is a symbolic act that would be picked up by those hearing this story in later times. Naomi and Ruth were

widows and survival would have been very hard without the support of others. Very often such a woman would need to be redeemed by her husband's nearest kinsman; be taken into his household and given the protection she has lost on the death of her husband. Ruth comes to the threshing floor as she is in need and has responded to the kindness and generosity she has already received from Boaz. In the place where the wheat and chaff are separated, Ruth approaches the man she has come to trust, the man who Naomi has named as the kinsman-redeemer (or covenant-redeemer as referred to in the passage David just read) in the hope that a new life, a new future can be found.

But the fulfilment of hope requires action and that brings me to my second point. Naomi, perhaps because she is now back in Bethlehem and has food in her cupboard, starts to think about the future for both herself and Ruth. And she makes a plan – a plan for Ruth to cast off her widow's clothing and make it known to Boaz that she is ready to be married once more. Boaz has a good reputation and he has demonstrated the truth of this in his care and concern for Ruth. Perhaps he has also shown his interest in her as a woman as well? We don't know, although such a suggestion could be read from this passage!

What we do know, though, is that Naomi makes a plan and Ruth puts it into action. Hope does require us to do something about it. It requires us to approach those we see as the source of that hope and offer up ourselves to that new future, a future that will not come to fruition unless we are proactive and also prepared to make ourselves vulnerable to those we approach. This plan could have gone very wrong for Ruth and for Naomi as well, but if these brave women hadn't acted then nothing would have happened and Ruth would not have become the great-grandmother of King David and a direct descendent of Jesus himself.

This week marks Christchurch's 51st Anniversary – a time when we celebrate the vision of 3 congregations and 2 denominations within Hitchin to come together in the hope that, with God's help, a new future would emerge. Those faithful people (and all who follow still in their steps) have faced many challenges on the way, but their willingness to become vulnerable (selling buildings and coming together as one of the early Local Ecumenical Partnerships in England) has enabled Christchurch to grow and evolve not just into the church community it is today, but into one that continues to look to the future with hope as God guides us forward.

Naomi took action and encouraged Ruth to approach Boaz as her kinsman-redeemer. We too need to approach Jesus as our Redeemer, willing to enter the threshing floor and have the chaff separated from the wheat of our lives so we can become daily more Christ-like in who we are and what we do. That makes us very vulnerable, but if we do nothing, then nothing will happen. Jesus holds his hand out to us and offers that sure and steadfast hope of salvation, but we need to reach out too and take hold. And we need to do that again and again because our hold gets weak, we let go and we can fall away. But the hope that God offers is never lost, it is never withdrawn and the Holy Spirit is always near to empower and encourage us to approach once more and retake the hand of Jesus, our Redeemer and our God.

So reach out, strengthen your hold and trust God to fulfil that sure and steadfast hope of a life lived in love and light in communion with that wonderful community that is the Trinity: God, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

Hymn – StF 633 ‘My soul finds rest...’

Christchurch Community Moment

Prayers for the World.

As we come together in prayer, I invite you to use your hands as we think about the needs of the world. As we think about these issues, please hold your hands in a cup – as if holding a butterfly. I will then invite you to open your hands and let those prayers free to fly to God.

Let us pray:

Cupped Hands

Lord of all hope: We hold before You our family and friends and pray that Your strength and love will be with us all in these challenging times. *Silence...*

Open Hands

Take these prayers and let hope fly free.

Cupped Hands

Lord of all hope: We hold before You our country, our government, our national institutions and all who have decisions to make that affect the lives of others. Help them see the world through Your eyes and work for the common good. *Silence...*

Open Hands

Take these prayers and let hope fly free.

Cupped Hands

Lord of all hope: We hold before You the world You created and gave us to care for. Guide us all to take action where we can. Help us speak out where there is injustice, never minding that this can leave us vulnerable, and help us to step into the shoes of others to learn to see the world from their point of view. *Silence...*

Open Hands

Take these prayers and let hope fly free.

Cupped Hands

Lord of all hope: We hold before You ourselves. Make us bold. Help us hear your voice, follow Your lead and shine Your light into a world in need. *Silence...*

Open Hands

Take these prayers and let hope fly free.

Amen.

Hymn – StF 455 ‘All my hope on God is founded...’

Blessing

May hope make us brave to approach our Redeemer King
May hope make us willing to take action and step out in faith
And may hope show us where we might to shine the light of Christ
So we can also be a source of hope in this world in need.

And may we rest in the blessing that comes from God
In whom all love and hope is found,
From Jesus Christ, our Redeemer and Friend
And from the Holy Spirit, our Comforter and Guide.
Amen.