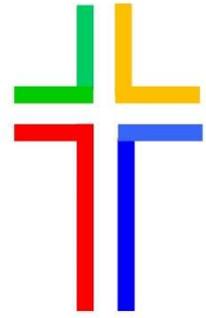


# Week St Mary Methodist Church – Sunday 7 June



In recent years, June has been designated by the Methodist Church as Bible Month. During the month there has been a focus on the whole of one of the shorter books of the Bible. This year it is the book of Ruth. Although the pandemic has made many things very different we thought it would be good to stay with at least one original plan – so Ruth it is; and it is a good story!

## PRAYER

Dear Lord, getting back to normal still seems to be a long way into the future, we miss the fellowship of friends and families, and life looks rather bleak. But other people have faced an even more uncertain future. We

think of Ruth as a widow, with no-one to support her, travelling to Judah, where she will be a migrant in strange land. And yet she had faith and trusted you. Give us faith, Lord, to do the same at this difficult time. **Amen**

## READING FOR TODAY Ruth 1:8-18 (NIV)

*The story of Ruth is set in Old Testament times when the people of Israel were settled in the Promised Land but had become less obedient to God than they should have been. There was a famine and Elimelek, a man from Bethlehem, went east to live in Moab with his wife, Naomi, and his two sons. Elimelek died but his sons married local girls from Moab, Orpah and Ruth. Eventually the two sons died as well leaving Naomi by herself with her two daughters-in-law. Naomi decided to go back to Judah, Orpah and Ruth went with her.*

<sup>8</sup>Then Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, 'Go back, each of you, to your mother's home. May the LORD show you kindness, as you have shown kindness to your dead husbands and to me. <sup>9</sup>May the LORD grant that each of you will find rest in the home of another husband.'

Then she kissed them goodbye and they wept aloud <sup>10</sup>and said to her, 'We will go back with you to your people.'

<sup>11</sup>But Naomi said, 'Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? <sup>12</sup>Return home, my

daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me – even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons – <sup>13</sup>would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD's hand has turned against me!'

<sup>14</sup>At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.

<sup>15</sup>'Look,' said Naomi, 'your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.'

<sup>16</sup>But Ruth replied, 'Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. <sup>17</sup>Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.' <sup>18</sup>When Naomi realised that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

*So the two women came to Bethlehem, just as the barley harvest was starting.*

## REFLECTION

The account of Ruth is set over 3000 years ago in a world that was very different from our current lives. But the issues that are dealt with are relevant to today – migration, famine, poverty and women's rights. And we can learn a lot from Ruth's story.

Ruth had learnt to trust the Lord, the Jewish God. She said to Naomi, 'your God will be my God'. That trust gave her the confidence to go into a strange land with her mother-in-law, where she knew she would be a migrant, and where she knew there was every chance she would be despised because the people of Israel, for historical reasons, looked down on the Moabites. But she had faith and trust in the Lord. Where did this come from? It could only have come from Naomi and her two sons. Their visible faith and trust had convinced Ruth. We need to ask ourselves if our faith and trust in God is visible enough to convince others.

Naomi felt the Lord had turned against her and brought her misfortune, 'the Lord's hand has turned against me'. Later, in verse 21, she cries that the Lord has afflicted her. She had been left a widow, the sons that would have looked after her had both died, and she was left destitute. But despite Naomi's bitterness, the Lord hadn't turned against her. There is happiness and security to come. Wait for the final instalment in three weeks!

Naomi also had the support of her daughters-in-law, especially Ruth, who was so devoted to Naomi that she left her own country so that they could stay with each other. The three of them together had been left bereaved, destitute and with no income. But they supported each other in this time of crisis, they built each other up (to use words from our hymn); something we need to do in the midst of our coronavirus crisis.

So, in conclusion, in this time of pandemic, however worried we are, we need to be like Naomi and Ruth. We need to trust the Lord, and to continue to act in ways that inspire others in faith.

#### **PRAYER FOR OTHERS**

We bring before you the family of George Floyd and all those who have suffered due to brutality by others. We ask that you be with those who protest and guide them to do so in peace and dignity; and be with our leaders and others in authority so that they listen to genuine concerns and respond accordingly.

We bring before you all those still suffering from Covid-19, especially in countries where it is still increasing. Bring them healing so they recover, and be with the people charged with their care.

We pray for our own families, friends, and neighbours and those known to us personally to be in grief, pain or need. Be with them we ask, and bring them help and comfort. Amen

#### **HYMN StF 608, H&P 753**

All praise to our redeeming Lord,  
who joins us by his grace,  
and bids us, each to each restored,  
together seek his face.

He bids us build each other up;  
and, gathered into one,

to our high calling's glorious hope  
we hand in hand go on.

The gift which he on one bestows,  
we all delight to prove;  
the grace through every vessel flows,  
in purest streams of love.

E'en now we think and speak the same,  
and cordially agree;  
concentred all, through Jesus' name,  
in perfect harmony.

We all partake the joy of one,  
the common peace we feel,  
a peace to sensual minds unknown,  
a joy unspeakable.

And if our fellowship below  
in Jesus be so sweet,  
what heights of rapture shall we know  
when round his throne we meet!

#### **BLESSING**

The LORD give strength to his people.  
The Lord bless his people with peace. Amen.

*"God does not need your good works, but your neighbour does". Martin Luther.*