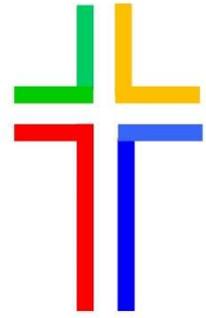


Week St Mary Methodist Church – Sunday 14 June



This is our second week of looking at the book of Ruth. This time we follow Ruth as she struggles to get food for herself and her mother-in-law, Naomi. It's a salutary reminder that 3000 years later people in the world still struggle for food; the Covid 19 pandemic has made it worse.

PRAYER

O Lord, we thank you for our community and the various ways in which people are helping each other at this time. We know that, although we are separated, there are a number of means of keeping in touch with

each other and with your message. We thank you in particular for the inspiration of these weekly service sheets, the study of the Bible that they encourage, and the deeper faith that follows. **Amen**

READING FOR TODAY Ruth 2:3-12 (NIV)

Naomi, and her daughter-in-law, Ruth, have returned to Naomi's land of Judah; both are widows. Naomi has relations of her husband's nearby, one of whom is called Boaz. The harvest is on and Ruth asks if she can go and collect the leftover grain from the fields (gleaning). Naomi says yes.

³So she went out, entered a field and began to glean behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she was working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelek.

⁴Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, 'The LORD be with you!' 'The LORD bless you!' they answered.

⁵Boaz asked the overseer of his harvesters, 'Who does that young woman belong to?'

⁶The overseer replied, 'She is the Moabite who came back from Moab with Naomi. ⁷She said, "Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters." She came into the field and has remained here from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter.'

⁸So Boaz said to Ruth, 'My daughter, listen to me. Don't go and glean in another field and don't go away from here. Stay here with the women who

work for me. ⁹Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the women. I have told the men not to lay a hand on you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled.'

¹⁰At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She asked him, 'Why have I found such favour in your eyes that you notice me – a foreigner?'

¹¹Boaz replied, 'I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband – how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. ¹²May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge.'

Boaz continued to allow Ruth to glean and even instructed his men to let her have some extra. She went back to Naomi with her grain and Naomi asked where she had been working. When Ruth said the field of Boaz, Naomi says that he is a close relative, one of our 'guardian-redeemers', and that Ruth should stay gleaning in his fields.

REFLECTION

Ruth and Naomi had arrived back in Bethlehem, where Naomi had come from, but their future life was very uncertain. Culture and society in Judah, like most of the world at that time, was very patriarchal, and women had no status or rights. If women were widowed, like Naomi and Ruth, they had great difficulty in earning any sort of living. Hence the provision that if a man dies his brother should marry the widow to maintain the family line and keep the family land intact (see

Deuteronomy 25:5). It sounds very odd to us now, but don't forget that men often had several wives at that time.

So, in the face of a need for food, Ruth asks Naomi if she can go gleaning, ie picking up the grain left behind by the harvesters. This was an action encouraged by Jewish law – see Deuteronomy 24:19, where the well-off were required to leave uncollected grain for widows, orphans, and foreigners – those without rights in other words. This concern and provision for widows, orphans and foreigners is a repeated theme in the Old Testament, an early welfare state if you like. We might ask ourselves whether, allowing for different circumstances, the well-off nowadays leave enough for those who are not so fortunate.

But Ruth was lucky, she ended up gleaning in a field owned by a close relative of Naomi's. And Boaz looked kindly on her because he had heard how Ruth had looked after Naomi. But Ruth didn't know that he was a relative and must have thought what unexpected kindness this man was showing. There is a link with today it that the community spirit during Covid 19 lockdown has produced many unexpected random acts of kindness – long may they continue.

Was it luck, though, that brought Ruth to the field of Boaz? Or was it the guiding hand of God who had a higher purpose for Ruth, as we find out over the next two weeks. As our hymn says 'most mighty your working, most wondrous your ways'!

PRAYER FOR OTHERS

We pray for children whose education has been disrupted by the pandemic, especially those whose difficult circumstances mean that little schooling can take place at home. Be with all those involved and help them to find solutions.

We pray for all those involved in music, drama, and other activities that are curtailed because the pandemic does not allow any community meetings. Be with them in their frustration, and help to maintain their joy and pride in collective creative activities.

Amen

HYMN StF 449, H&P 699 (*the tune is on the CD, Lord of all hopefulness*)

Lord of creation, to you be all praise!
Most mighty your working, most wondrous
your ways!
Your glory and might are beyond us to tell,
and yet in the heart of the humble you dwell.

Lord of all power, I give you my will,
in joyful obedience your tasks to fulfil.
Your bondage is freedom, your service is
song;
and, held in your keeping, my weakness is
strong.

Lord of all wisdom, I give you my mind,
rich truth that surpasses my knowledge to
find.
What eye has not seen and what ear has not
heard
is taught by your Spirit and shines from your
Word.

Lord of all bounty, I give you my heart;
I praise and adore you for all you impart;
your love to inspire me, your counsel to
guide,
your presence to shield me, whatever betide.

Lord of all being, I give you my all;
if I should disown you, I stumble and fall;
but, led in your service your word to obey,
I'll walk in your freedom to the end of the
way.

BLESSING

The LORD bless you and keep you;
The LORD make his face shine on you and be
gracious to you;
The LORD turn his face toward you and give
you peace. Amen.

*"When we lose one blessing, another is often
most unexpectedly given in its place", C. S.
Lewis*