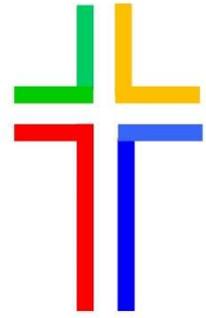


Week St Mary Methodist Church – Sunday 21 June



This is our third week of looking at the book of Ruth. Despite the success of Ruth's gleaning, Ruth and her mother-in-law, Naomi, are still in a precarious situation as widows, with no rights or income. We might reflect on whether there are still people in this world in that position.

PRAYER

As we share this service together, let us remember that this pandemic is affecting everyone in different ways. Some people have lost their jobs, while others are busier than ever; some are in perpetual isolation for health reasons, others are out and about as

normal; some are surrounded by family, others have not seen their families for months. Whatever our circumstances, Lord, be with us as we learn to cope with new ways and lifestyles. **Amen**

READING FOR TODAY Ruth 3:5-14 (NIV)

After their arrival in Judah, Ruth has been gleaning in the fields belonging to Boaz. Naomi wants to achieve a more permanent solution to their hand-to-mouth existence. She suggests that Ruth goes to the threshing floor where Boaz is working and when he goes to sleep at night (next to the grain to protect it) that Ruth should lie down at his feet.

⁵ 'I will do whatever you say,' Ruth answered.

⁶ So she went down to the threshing-floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do.

⁷ When Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits, he went over to lie down at the far end of the grain pile. Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down. ⁸ In the middle of the night something startled the man; he turned – and there was a woman lying at his feet!

⁹ 'Who are you?' he asked.

'I am your servant Ruth,' she said. 'Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a guardian-redeemer of our family.'

¹⁰ 'The LORD bless you, my daughter,' he replied. 'This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: you have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor.'

¹¹ And now, my daughter, don't be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All the people of my town know that you are a woman of noble character. ¹² Although it is true that I am a guardian-redeemer of our family, there is another who is more closely related than I.

¹³ Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to do his duty as your guardian-redeemer, good; let him redeem you. But if he is not willing, as surely as the LORD lives I will do it. Lie here until morning.'

¹⁴ So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before anyone could be recognised; and he said, 'No one must know that a woman came to the threshing-floor.'

Before Ruth left he gave her six measures of barley in her shawl and said you mustn't go back to your mother-in-law empty handed.

When she got home Naomi said to Ruth 'wait and see what happens now'.

REFLECTION

We met the phrase 'guardian-redeemer' last week, and this week Ruth reminds Boaz that he is 'guardian-redeemer' of the family. The Hebrew word for 'guardian-redeemer' is a legal term for a close relative who has the obligation to buy family land or marry a family widow, the purpose is to keep the land in the family and provide an heir who will inherit. In this case Boaz isn't the closest relative but he goes off to find the one who is. Next week we find out what happens.

You might think, on first sight, that Naomi was a real schemer – sending Ruth off to Boaz at night, making it clear that Ruth was available for marriage. But was Naomi a schemer, or was she just trying to claim her legal rights under the Law? Once you know about the legal obligation you might give her the benefit of the doubt.

There could be a sexual overtone to Ruth's actions. There is elsewhere in the Bible, Esther for instance, or Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38, where the seduction is clear. But with Ruth and Boaz it isn't spelt out, and we have to assume that it is all innocent. Ruth seems to be chastely making it clear to Boaz that she is available for marriage and that Boaz has an obligation. And Boaz acts honourably as well, even to the extent of saying there is a nearer relative who has a greater claim. He is also concerned for Ruth's reputation and tells her to go before morning; and he gives her some grain to take back to Naomi. We might reflect whether we always act as honourably and openly as Ruth and Boaz did.

This all takes place against the background of the threshing floor after a successful harvest. But don't think big threshing machines. In Old Testament times threshing was done with a flail, with the evening breeze blowing the chaff away. So perhaps a harvest hymn is appropriate this week; and Boaz and Ruth both seem to have had humble, thankful hearts, in the final words of the hymn.

PRAYER FOR OTHERS

On this Father's Day we thank you for our own fathers, and the guidance and care they gave us as we grew up.

We also think of families today, and the stresses caused by living through a pandemic. We ask, O Lord, for your help with families that are struggling at present.

We think of families across the world, in difficulty through poverty, illness, conflict, or abuse. We know that families can be a source of support, but also, in many cases, can be part of the problem. We ask for your love and help to be with those families. Amen

HYMN H&P 352 STF 130 (and on the CD)

We plough the fields and scatter
The good seed on the land,
But it is fed and watered
By God's almighty hand:
He sends the snow in winter,
The warmth to swell the grain,
The breezes and the sunshine,
And soft, refreshing rain.

*Chorus: All good gifts around us
Are sent from heaven above;
Then thank the Lord, O thank the Lord,
For all his love.*

He only is the maker
Of all things near and far;
He paints the wayside flower,
He lights the evening star;
The winds and waves obey him,
By him the birds are fed;
Much more to us, his children,
He gives our daily bread.

We thank thee then, O Father,
For all things bright and good,
The seed time and the harvest,
Our life, our health, our food.
Accept the gifts we offer
For all thy love imparts,
And what thou most desirest,
Our humble, thankful hearts.

BLESSING

Lord, bless us with your wisdom and guidance as Boaz, Naomi and Ruth were blessed.
And may the blessing of God almighty, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be amongst us and remain with us always. Amen

"Humility is not thinking less of yourself, but thinking of yourself less", C. S. Lewis