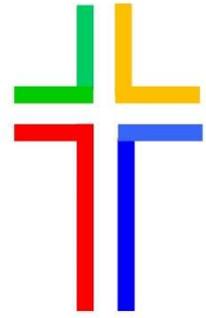


Week St Mary Methodist Church – Sunday 28 June



This is our final week of looking at the book of Ruth and, as you will see, God's plan for Naomi and Ruth is fulfilled; it turns out alright in the end. Also, you may have seen that it is now possible to open places of worship for services, with restrictions, and our first service may be on Sunday 12th July. More news next week. For the time being we will also continue with the printed service sheets because we recognise that there will still be people needing to isolate.

PRAYER

Lord, be with us as we read, pray and sing this service of worship in our own homes. We look forward to being able to meet again as a congregation but we also know that it will be a long time before everything returns to

normal. Help us not to be downcast by that fact but to see and grasp the opportunities for learning from this episode and becoming more like the people you would want us to be. **Amen**

READING FOR TODAY Ruth 4:3-10 (NIV)

Boaz went to the town gate to find the guardian-redeemer he mentioned; he also assembled 10 leading citizens as witnesses.

³Then he said to the guardian-redeemer, 'Naomi, who has come back from Moab, is selling the piece of land that belonged to our relative Elimelek. ⁴I thought I should bring the matter to your attention and suggest that you buy it in the presence of these seated here and in the presence of the elders of my people. If you will redeem it, do so. But if you will not, tell me, so I will know. For no one has the right to do it except you, and I am next in line.'

'I will redeem it,' he said.

⁵Then Boaz said, 'On the day you buy the land from Naomi, you also acquire Ruth the Moabite, the dead man's widow, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property.'

⁶At this, the guardian-redeemer said, 'Then I cannot redeem it because I might endanger my own estate. You redeem it yourself. I cannot do it.'

⁷(Now in earlier times in Israel, for the redemption and transfer of property to become final, one party took off his sandal and gave it to the other. This was the method of legalising transactions in Israel.)

⁸So the guardian-redeemer said to Boaz, 'Buy it yourself.' And he removed his sandal.

⁹Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, 'Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelek, Kilion and Mahlon. ¹⁰I have also acquired Ruth the Moabite, Mahlon's widow, as my wife, in order to maintain the name of the dead with his property, so that his name will not disappear from among his family or from his home town. Today you are witnesses!'

The elders confirmed the transaction. Boaz duly married Ruth and they had a son, who they named Obed. So Naomi had a grandson and heir and everyone said how blessed she was to have a daughter-in-law like Ruth. Not only that, Obed went on to be the grandfather of King David.

REFLECTION

Boaz was looking kindly on the widow Naomi, and her daughter-in-law Ruth. He had a duty, as a family member, to assist Naomi and Ruth but there was a closer relative who had a prior right and duty. Boaz went to find this closer relative and resolve the issue in front of witnesses. Naomi's late husband, Elimelek, apparently had land which, had they lived, would have gone to his sons. It was

unlikely that Naomi as a widow would have inherited herself. The Guardian-Redeemer had a duty to acquire the land, and to marry Ruth, so as to provide an heir who could inherit the land. If that happened the land would revert to Elimelech's family, the Guardian-Redeemer would lose what he had bought, and he would have another family to support. He decided he could not do it. But Boaz was more generous, or perhaps, he really wanted to marry Ruth, not just out of duty.

The settlement and marriage was blessed by the elders. There were times in Jewish history when intermarriage was condemned (in the time of Nehemiah, for instance) but it wasn't the foreign blood that was the problem, it was whether foreign people accepted the one true God that was important – like Ruth did.

Boaz and Ruth had a son, Obed, and his descendants included the great King David, and ultimately, Jesus. Out of this unlikely tragedy of three widowed women came a descendent who was the Messiah, the one sent to save the world. Perhaps the presence of a foreign woman, Ruth, in this family tree, points to Jesus as saviour of the Gentiles and the whole world – not just the Jews.

It was a happy ending for Naomi and Ruth, but we can see some encouraging themes running through the whole story – the loving-kindness of Boaz, Naomi and Ruth sticking up for their rights, the acceptance of a foreigner, and behind it all, God's greater purpose leading to David and Jesus.

Naomi and Ruth trusted the Lord and believed he was guiding them, a theme of our hymn.

PRAYER FOR OTHERS

Lord, we bring before you all those still suffering in this pandemic, and the doctors, nurses, and carers whose role it is to look after them. Be with them, we ask.

Lord, we know that, even as some things return to normal, there are many people who will have had their lives changed by this pandemic – people in grief at the loss of a loved one, people suffering other ongoing medical problems, people for whom financial or other circumstances have deteriorated dramatically. Be with them, we ask.

Lord, we think of all those trying to make their way, like Ruth, in a strange country. And we know that they will not all meet the loving-kindness given out by Boaz. Be with them, we ask. Amen

HYMN STF 481 (and on the CD)

The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want;
He makes me lie in pastures green.
He leads me by the still, still waters,
His goodness restores my soul.

*Chorus: And I will trust in You alone,
And I will trust in You alone,
For Your endless mercy follows me,
Your goodness will lead me home.*

He guides my ways in righteousness,
And He anoints my head with oil,
And my cup, it overflows with joy,
I feast on His pure delights.

And though I walk the darkest path,
I will not fear the evil one,
For You are with me, and Your rod and staff
Are the comfort I need to know.

BLESSING

Ruth and Naomi trusted that God had a plan for them and that he would guide them. Lord, bless us so that we trust Him in the same way.

And may the blessing of God almighty, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be amongst us and remain with us always. Amen

*"Trusting God does not mean believing he will do what you want, but rather believing he will do everything he knows is good."
— Ken Sande*