

Circuit Worship Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> October 2020 led by Rev Kim Shorley

Call to Worship

Come, let us worship the Lord - our Maker and Sustainer,  
who created and blesses us, and teaches us about Life.

Come, let us worship the Lord – the Law-Giving God,  
who teaches us how to respond to God and to each other.

Come, let us worship the Lord – the God of all knowledge,  
who sees, knows, forgives and loves us – just as we are.

**May our words and our thoughts be pleasing to you,  
O LORD, our Rock, our Redeemer, and our Eternal God. Amen.**

Singing the Faith 24

Come, now is the time to worship.  
Come, now is the time to give your heart.  
Come, just as you are to worship.  
Come, just as you are before your God, come.

*One day every tongue  
will confess you are God,  
one day every knee will bow.  
Still, the greatest treasure remains  
for those who gladly choose you now.*

Come, now is the time to worship ...

Brian Doerksen (b. 1965)

Our opening prayer comes from day 4 of the District Prayer Diary:  
Open our eyes, our minds and our hearts with your unconditional love,  
Nudge us beyond the confines of our normal, towards the bigger picture –  
The all-encompassing world of your creation.  
Amen

Prayer of Confession

**Forgive us when we walk away from you and then wonder where you are.  
Forgive us when we fail to see the signs you place along our path.  
Forgive us when we are too distracted to revel in the wonder of creation.  
Forgive us when we forget who we are and whose we are.  
Remind us that we are not a lost, but a found people  
And that there is no place we can go where you are not.  
Amen**

Words of Assurance

Friends, hear the Good News. Wherever we are, there God is. We are never alone, and we are never left to our own devices.

In the name of Jesus Christ, know that you are forgiven!

**Thanks be to God!**

## Welcome to Bible Month

What began in 2015 as a pilot project involving two London churches and two North East churches Bible Month has grown into a connexional wide initiative that offers the opportunity for churches and circuits to engage intensively and deeply with a single a book of the Bible over a four-week period.

For 2020 our focus is the book of Ruth, and I offer you this moment to think about what you may already know, or have heard about this story.

You may wish to note down a few of your thoughts here:



Writing for The Times Rabbi Jonathan Sacks says this of the book of Ruth "I find it moving that the Bible dedicates a book to the story of David's great-grandmother Ruth, as if to say that her life was no less significant than his. She was a stranger, an outsider, someone with nothing but her own force of character, her refusal to walk away from another person's troubles. David was a military hero, a master politician, a king. There is a form of greatness, suggests the Bible, that has nothing to do with power, fame or renown. It exists in simple deeds of kindness and friendship, generosity and grace. Rarely do they make the news. But they change lives, redeeming some of the pain of the human situation."

### Prayer

Sometimes we are puzzled by what we find in the Bible.  
So much of it is hard to understand or to accept.

Spirit of God, clear our minds and give us the courage and determination to struggle together to wrest a meaning from its words.

Loving God, speak to us as we read and study the Bible:  
**Draw us closer to you.**

Sometimes we approach the Bible with fixed ideas,  
We tend to take from it only what agrees with our beliefs,

Spirit of God, clear our minds and give us the faith and humility  
to share together new and challenging discoveries.

Loving God, speak to us as we read and study the Bible:  
**Draw us closer to you.**

Sometimes we approach the Bible burdened by our own ignorance, reading it can make us feel  
anxious or embarrassed.

Spirit of God, clear our minds and give us the trust and openness to confess together our need  
for help in understanding.

Loving God, speak to us as we read and study the Bible:  
**Draw us closer to you.**

Sometimes we approach the Bible with joyful curiosity. We are eager to learn more about you.

Spirit of God, clear our minds and give us the grace and love to listen to one another as we share insights and experiences.

Loving God, speak to us as we read and study the Bible:

**Draw us closer to you.**

Singing the Faith 161

- 1 Speak, O Lord, as we come to you  
to receive the food of your holy word.  
Take your truth, plant it deep in us ;  
shape and fashion us in your likeness,  
that the light of Christ might be seen today  
in our acts of love and our deeds of faith.  
Speak, O Lord, and fulfil in us  
all your purposes, for your glory.
  
- 2 Teach us, Lord, full obedience,  
holy reverence, true humility.  
Test our thoughts and our attitudes  
in the radiance of your purity.  
Cause our faith to rise, cause our eyes to see  
your majestic love and authority.  
Words of power that can never fail ;  
let their truth prevail over unbelief.
  
- 3 Speak, O Lord, and renew our minds ;  
help us grasp the heights of your plans for us.  
Truths unchanged from the dawn of time  
that will echo down through eternity.  
And by grace we'll stand on your promises,  
and by faith we'll walk as you walk with us.  
Speak, O Lord, till your Church is built  
and the earth is filled with your glory.

Keith Getty (*b.* 1974) and Stuart Townend (*b.* 1963)

## **Ruth 1:1-22 (New Revised Standard Version)**

### Elimelech's Family Goes to Moab

<sup>1</sup>In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and two sons. <sup>2</sup>The name of the man was Elimelech and the name of his wife Naomi, and the names of his two sons were Mahlon and Chilion; they were Ephrathites from Bethlehem in Judah. They went into the country of Moab and remained there. <sup>3</sup>But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. <sup>4</sup>These took Moabite wives; the name of one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth. When they had lived there for about ten years, <sup>5</sup>both Mahlon and Chilion also died, so that the woman was left without her two sons or her husband.

### Naomi and Her Moabite Daughters-in-Law

<sup>6</sup> Then she started to return with her daughters-in-law from the country of Moab, for she had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD had had consideration for his people and given them

food.<sup>7</sup> So she set out from the place where she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to go back to the land of Judah.<sup>8</sup> But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, 'Go back each of you to your mother's house. May the LORD deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me.<sup>9</sup> The LORD grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband.' Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud.<sup>10</sup> They said to her, 'No, we will return with you to your people.'<sup>11</sup> But Naomi said, 'Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands?<sup>12</sup> Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons,<sup>13</sup> would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the LORD has turned against me.'<sup>14</sup> Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

<sup>15</sup> So she said, 'See, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and to her gods; return after your sister-in-law.'<sup>16</sup> But Ruth said,

'Do not press me to leave you  
or to turn back from following you!

Where you go, I will go;  
where you lodge, I will lodge;  
your people shall be my people,  
and your God my God.

<sup>17</sup> Where you die, I will die—  
there will I be buried.

May the LORD do thus and so to me,  
and more as well,

if even death parts me from you!

<sup>18</sup> When Naomi saw that she was determined to go with her, she said no more to her.

<sup>19</sup> So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them; and the women said, 'Is this Naomi?'<sup>20</sup> She said to them,

'Call me no longer Naomi,  
call me Mara,  
for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me.

<sup>21</sup> I went away full,  
but the LORD has brought me back empty;

why call me Naomi  
when the LORD has dealt harshly with me,  
and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?'

<sup>22</sup> So Naomi returned together with Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, who came back with her from the country of Moab. They came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.

## **Reflection**

As the introductory exercise demonstrated most of us will come to this reading with some prior knowledge or understanding of the story of Ruth, and what it is we might be expecting to hear from this text. For some this is a love story, or a moral tale to help remind young girls to wait for their Boaz, for others it's a tale friendship and determination, a story of grief and new beginnings and for others it's a redemptive legacy story with everything working out in the end for good. Can I affirm that it is all these things and still there is room for more. Multiple agendas – theological, social and political – work themselves out in this gritty narrative, which despite being called the Book of Ruth is written from Naomi's point of view.

Chapter 1 is a full of reversals, contrasts and names. In a highly patriarchal society, the men in Naomi's life are swiftly removed from the narrative leaving its original hearers to wonder how God's agency will manifest in the lives of these three widowed women, especially as two of them are 'foreign' wives. What is worse is that Mahlon (a little illness) and Chilion (a little destruction) took Moabite women and alarm bells ring as throughout the Hebrew Scripture there is a strong bias against anything good coming out of Moab (see Genesis 19:30-38 and Deuteronomy 23:3-6). Yet it was to Moab that Elimelech (whose name means 'my God is King') moved his family to in search of food as Bethlehem, the 'house of bread' was experiencing a time of famine. Scholars debate as to whether this was a divine response to the fact that in the time of Judges "all the people did what was right in their own eyes" (Judges 21:25). Doing what is right in your own eyes is never a good thing in the Bible; and, indeed, the book of Judges traces a story of decline and anarchy in Israel.

Verse 6 finds Naomi preparing to leave Moab, for she has heard that God's blessings has returned to her homeland and she begins the journey back to the land of Judah with both Orpah and Ruth. This begins the first of two lengthy conversations with them. She starts first by seeking God's blessing on them and implores them both return their "mother's house" (verses 8-9) – again we note this is an unusually female-centric term, given that the Bible usually prefers "father's house" – she focuses on the importance of their finding husbands, so that they may have security. The word *menuchah* (verse 9), which the NRSV translates as "security," has the sense of a "settled rest" or being "at home;" for these single women in the ancient Near East, their best hope for long-term safety and prosperity is to find new husbands as soon as possible.

Orpah and Ruth refuse, and so Naomi tries again. Practical advice this time is offered. It is her, Naomi, who cannot fulfil the legal duty to these young widows by bearing any other sons, and so they do not need to feel be duty bound to her, and she advises them not to spend a bitter future with her and to actively look for remarriage. We must resist setting Orpah and Ruth against each at this point, for whilst Orpah leaves we hear how painful that decision is and whilst still weeping (verse 14) Orpah and Naomi kiss and part and whilst Ruth clings to Naomi, Naomi again instructs Ruth to leave, to do what Orpah had done with words that sound a little like peer pressure 'See, your sister-in-law has gone back...'

Whilst three chapters remain to their story, it is here, in chapter 1, that we find the most familiar passage within the book of Ruth: 'Do not press me to leave you

or to turn back from following you!  
Where you go, I will go;  
where you lodge, I will lodge;  
your people shall be my people,  
and your God my God.' (verse 16)

Here we begin to get the hint that Naomi's grief is not to be at the heart of this story, although as she arrives back to the community that knew her before tragedy struck her family Naomi (like Job) laments honestly about her loss and disappointment, her grief and bitterness, going so far as to renounce her pleasant (for that is what Naomi means) name and asks to be known as Mara, although we note that the narrator refuses to let her be known by this new name.

Naomi closes this chapter with words that remind us of her reversal of fortune, once her life was full; and now she is empty (verse 21) even though Ruth is standing beside her. However the closing words of the narrator speaks of the coming barley harvest, the promise of something more. Unlike those who hear this story for the first time we already know (thanks in part to Matthew's genealogy) that "Ruth the Moabite" (verse 22) will not only bring a blessing to her

Mother in Law, but also to the whole nation of Israel in the generations that followed. (Matthew 1:5)

### **For Further Reflection**

Where do you see yourself in this story?

Is there anything new or surprising that struck you as you read/listened to the whole chapter?

Have you ever been a stranger in a new land? Who befriended you and how did that make you feel?

Have there been times when circumstances have made you reconsidered who or whose you are? What helps you at those times? What role does your faith play at difficult times?

### **Prayers Of Intercession**

Compassionate God,  
we pray for vulnerable people all over this world,  
people without power who live in places of terror and violence, fear and oppression.

Protect them, God;  
we feel so powerless ourselves to help them.  
Encourage and empower us to work for peace and freedom from fear in our own contexts.

Let your word come forth

**And give us light.**

God of Grace,  
we pray for those whose lives have been turned upside down by various disasters:  
floods, fire and drought-driven famine.  
Bring courage and hope to them; through their pain, may they remain connected to you in prayer.

We pray for those say there is no God;  
may we through the living of our own lives demonstrate the joy and peace of a Spirit-centred existence.

Let your word come forth

**And give us light.**

God of Justice,  
We pray for those who lead us, locally and globally, that they may be people of honesty and integrity, compassionate in their dealings and seek righteousness.

Give wisdom to all who influence our minds and our hearts.  
Let your word come forth

**And give us light.**

God of Community,  
we pray for our circuit and our local churches; may we be a source of hope for our neighbourhood.

Help us to discern local needs and work to fulfill them.

Strengthen and unify our worship and show us how we can be the disciples you envision us to be.

We pray for those who are sick at this time, for those who are distressed, lonely and feel forsaken at this time, and for all who are suffering at the loss of those they have loved.

Let your word come forth

**And give us light.**

Singing the Faith 59

- 1 Lord, the light of your love is shining,  
in the midst of the darkness, shining:  
Jesus, Light of the world, shine upon us;  
set us free by the truth you now bring us —  
shine on me, shine on me.  
*Shine, Jesus, shine,  
fill this land with the Father's glory;  
blaze, Spirit, blaze,  
set our hearts on fire.  
Flow, river, flow,  
flood the nations with grace and mercy;  
send forth your word,  
Lord, and let there be light!*
- 2 Lord, I come to your awesome presence,  
from the shadows into your radiance;  
by your blood I may enter your brightness:  
search me, try me, consume all my darkness —  
shine on me, shine on me.  
*Shine, Jesus, shine,*
- 3 As we gaze on your kingly brightness  
so our faces display your likeness,  
ever changing from glory to glory:  
mirrored here, may our lives tell your story —  
shine on me, shine on me.  
*Shine, Jesus, shine,*

Graham Kendrick (b. 1950)

A prayer of Blessing

May you know God walking with you and God's great love for you today, and may God's care and protection meet your needs and bring blessing to you. Amen.

Please be assured that we are still here if you need anything at all during this time.

Circuit staff can be contacted by calling 01933 312778 for Rev Lesley Dinham / 01933 622137 for Rev Kim Shorley.

*(Please note that Rev Lesley is on leave 1<sup>st</sup>- 7<sup>th</sup> October)*

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