

Haverhill Methodist Church – Worship at Home
Sunday 16th August 2020

Welcome Message – Revd. Peter Goodhall

Our series of guest preachers in August continues as we welcome back Vivien Sargeant of Clare Baptist Church to bring us the word of God today. Vivien will be sharing with us the experiences and lessons of the Old Testament book of Ruth.

Let us worship the Lord who gives us all we need for life.

Hymn

Prayer

Living Lord,
we praise you that you are a God who loves.
You have given us a marvellous world,
to live in and to share with all your people.
You, O God, love everyone equally,
and we thank you that we are each unique.
We thank you that each one of us
has so much to give – and to receive – from each other.
Thank you for each new experience that you give us. **Amen.**

Bible Readings

Ruth Chapter 1 verses 1-22

Mark Chapter 12 verses 28-34

Hymn

Prayer

Providing God, you journeyed with Ruth and comforted her when her life was burdened by grief. Grant us faith to believe you will provide a future where we see none, that bitterness may turn to joy and barrenness may bear life. **Amen.**

Sermon

Introduction

Greetings from Clare, John and myself.

I trust and pray that you are well.

The story of Ruth is one of my favourites, ever since I was a child. Its happy every ending, an almost Cinderella feel. It is set in a time when Israel was in confusion, had lost its way, civil and international wars, it had no king, no leader and every man did whatever he liked. I love it that whenever you look at the Bible the stories, passages always seem to fit today's lifestyle.

Bad Decisions, God's forgiveness and mercy

The story begins introducing Elimelech and his family. We know that his ancestry can be found in Judah, as does Boaz. As such, it is thought, he came from a wealthy and powerful clan. BUT as we know that life in Israel was full of evil, then added to this was a drought. Bethlehem was usually a fertile land, so the drought would have been unexpected, unprepared for. So Elimelech took his family to Moab. An unusual decision for a Jew, as generally relationships with the Moabites was not great. He decided to become a refugee, moving to a place that wouldn't have held the same laws, religious observations, such a move might well have brought disgrace on the family. The wording in the first verse suggests that he didn't expect to stay, only till things improved in Bethlehem. Things didn't go well, first Elimelech died. Then the decision was made to marry the sons to Moabite women, but the sons died leaving no heir. We read the Naomi decided to return to her home after 10 years, accepting her situation as God's judgement on her for the bad decisions taken. She became sad and bitter, feeling there was no hope now that they were no family line left to continue the name. Her only hope was to accept her lot and return home. Normally the daughters in law would go wherever she went, it would have been difficult for them to find another man to take them.

Ps 38 v1 David expresses the same, 'Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger'. A psalm that sums up how Naomi felt. However, at the end of the Psalm he rejoiced in God's mercy, love and forgiveness, something Naomi had no hope or thought of.

Even when we make those bad decisions God's love and forgiveness is always there.

When we forget/run away from God he goes with us.

He waits for us to turn again to Him.

Bad decisions do not lead to God forsaking us.

Lop sided agreement, God's covenant

Naomi was not a bad person, just because she made bad decisions. Both Orpah and Ruth were willing to go with her to a new country. These women may well have been quite young, as marriage took place when girls were in their early teens. Ruth, however, had sense something greater than the sadness and bitterness that Naomi felt. She also saw past the loving, kind person whose God she wanted to know more about. V16 – 18 is a well-known passage. Ruth puts her whole life on a plate and promises to give Naomi everything in exchange for living with her and her ways. Naomi reluctantly agrees and so we have a very lop sided agreement, where one person offers everything she is and has, while the other offers loneliness, hardship and uncertainty.

God, by sending His son to die and rise again offers us a lop sided covenant. All he wants from us is ourselves and a willingness to learn, to follow and to worship.

We have nothing we can offer in return.

Rev Paul Fiddes, a retired Oxford theologian when talking about the effect of Zoom/internet on our Christian lives considers our covenant with God, our fellowship with each other and the works of the Body of Christ. As we consider our roles within those areas we have learnt new meanings of those words. We have seen how our fellowship doesn't have to be around the church building, but how we show our love to each other. That the things we do and say, the phone calls etc show a new working within the Body of Christ. The agreement with God hasn't changed because our way of worship; coming together has.

Our God is more powerful than anything we see and know.

The barley Harvest, our work doesn't stop

Ruth on arriving in Bethlehem went and gleaned on the edge of the field to survive. The work was hard, beset with difficulties added to that was the fact that she was a young Moabite woman.

We have had to learn new ways to harvest and it feels a bit like we are gleaning. But I have found that conversations with folk have led me to rejoice in the way God's spirit is working.

There is always a harvest. We pray "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

Our role hasn't changed; we are still called to work for the harvest.

We may have felt cut off from God, the church but in this story of Ruth we are reminded again that He has a plan, a purpose and a work for us to do.

May God bless you and encourage you as you work for Him, knowing that in all things He is the conqueror, our Lord and Saviour.

Hymn

Prayers for Others

Friends in Christ, God invites us to hold the needs of our sisters and brothers as dear to us as our own needs. Loving our neighbours as ourselves, we offer our thanksgivings and our petitions on behalf of the church and the world. God of all hope we call on you today.

We pray for those who are living in fear:

Fear of illness, fear for loved ones, fear of other's reactions to them.

May your Spirit give us a sense of calmness and peace.

We pray for your church in this time of uncertainty.

For those people who are worried about attending worship.

For those needing to make decisions in order to care for others.

For those who will feel more isolated by not being able to attend.

Grant us your wisdom.

Holy God, we remember that you have promised that nothing will separate us from your love – demonstrated to us in Jesus Christ.

Help us turn our eyes, hearts and minds to you.

In the quietness, make your requests known to God through Christ Jesus our Lord and Friend...

The Lord hears our prayer. **Thanks be to God. Amen.**

Unite your prayers with the whole church as you pray

The Lord's Prayer. 'Our Father...'

Hymn

The Blessing

We offer our lives and our gifts to the Lord.

Journeying God, go with us now, stay with us now.

We will be your people. You are our God.

Let us go in peace and walk in love, serving the Lord in all we do.

Amen.

Coffee Time Conversation

- What changes have you embraced or resisted in 2020?
- What have you 'gleaned' from the fringes?
- Give thanks for God's 'lop-sided' covenant of love.

Suggested Hymns and Songs

More Traditional Music:

When we walk with the Lord (Trust and obey)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2IDJQivWjdc>

O for a thousand tongues to sing

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-dEfvz6Vms>

O breath of life come sweeping through us

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5QHZB_v0ZaY

More Contemporary Music:

My Lighthouse

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IFBZJGSgyVQ>

Guardian

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MiRH8Hc8VQI>

The Lord's My Shepherd (Stuart Townend)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-elQQayhpak>

Keep social distancing. Keep safe. Keep communicating.

Persevere in your walk with God.

God bless you and keep you until we meet again.

You are missed!

My prayers are with you.

With love,

Peter