

Bible Month: Ruth 1

Beckminster Methodist Church, Wolverhampton

Sunday, 7 June 2020

This month's reflections are provided by our friend Dr Rachel Starr who does not need an introduction to you. We are very grateful to Rachel for her time, knowledge and skills in leading our Bible studies and Reflections this month, and we want to thank also Revd Peggy Heim for her contribution to the Bible studies. Our first Bible study meeting is on Wednesday, 10 June at 7.00pm. For those who are joining us, please read the whole of Ruth chapter one as a way of preparing for the session. If you want to join us but have not told us yet, please let Sue Lorimer know and she will send you a zoom link which will allow you to join us.

StF 116

3. Sing for God's justice disturbing each easy illusion;
tearing down tyrants and putting our pride to confusion;
lifeblood of right, resisting evil and slight,
offering freedom's transfusion.

4. Sing for God's saints who have travelled faith's journey before us;
who in our weakness give us their hope to restore us;
in them we see the new creation to be,
spirit of love made flesh for us.

Kathy Galloway (b.1950)

Prayer

God of mercy,
your love for us is strong,
but our love for you is weak.
You call us to follow Jesus ,
but we are slow to obey.
You care for all that you have made,
but we ignore the needs of others
and misuse your creation.
We are sorry for our sins.
Forgive us,
and help us to please you by the way we live;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Methodist Worship Book p.198

Collect

Almighty and everlasting God,
you have given us your servant's grace,
by the confession of a true faith,
to acknowledge the glory of the eternal Trinity
and in the power of the divine majesty to worship the Unity;
keep us steadfast in this faith,
that we may evermore be defended from all adversities;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Methodist Worship Book p.546

Reflections

'Then they wept aloud again.' (Ruth 1.14)

The book of Ruth takes place in a time of crisis, marked by hunger, violence and the bitterness and division of many generations. For in the days when the judges ruled, 'the people did what was right in their own eyes' (Judges 21.25).

How little seems to have changed, we might reflect. The Covid-19 pandemic has not by itself created misery, mistrust and misrule; but its impact has been increased by lasting inequality and injustice in our country and our world. We see it in the disproportionate impact Covid-19 has had on Black and Asian communities in this country. We see it in the lack of attention paid to care home residents and staff. We see it in the huge demand on food banks.

At many points over these past few months, I have felt overwhelmed by sorrow, anger and frustration. And, I imagine, many of you have felt similarly lost, grieving for friends and family, for hopes and dreams, for a hundred everyday things.

As Naomi discovers during the course of book of Ruth, grief is not easily overcome. Yet, the story of Naomi and her daughters-in-law, Orpah and Ruth, offer us a number of ways in which we might respond to loss with 'loving kindness.'

This week's reflection focuses on Orpah. In the coming weeks, we will spend time with Naomi, Ruth – and Boaz also.

A Moabite woman like Ruth, Orpah has for too long been overlooked. In the painting 'Ruth and Naomi' by the Chinese artist He Qi, Orpah is already turned away from the other two women. But a basket of three grains at the edge of the image reminds us that all three of the women were companions for each other, sharing bread as they travelled along the road.

In both Jewish and Christian readings of this chapter, Orpah has been set against Ruth, portrayed as the disloyal woman who turned her back on her mother-in-law. While Ruth is presented as the faithful convert, Orpah is given the role of the disbeliever, clinging to her own gods. Yet, both have much to share with us as we journey with them.

Both women are praised by Naomi for their kindness or loyalty to her. Both are willing to become foreigners in Judah for the sake of this foreign woman. Both weep at the thought of saying goodbye. Both brave a new, unknown future in different ways.

Orpah returns to her mother, her home, her faith tradition. She reminds us that everyone has a home somewhere. No-one, no matter what certain politicians or media outlets tell us, is simply a foreigner. Everyone has a story, a journey, a life that matters. And, as the Bible tells us again and again, it is those who grieve with such sorrow, who are far from home, who are poor, lonely or afraid, for whom the heart of God beats strongest.

Rachel Starr

For more resources on the book of Ruth, see the Bible Month website:
<https://www.preachweb.org/biblemonth>

Prayers for others

Hear graciously the prayers we make for those affected by the virus in various parts of the world. We pray for those who feel overwhelmed by sorrow, anger and frustration; lift them from their despair and give them hope. Grant healing to the sick, eternal life to the dead and consolation to the bereaved families.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayers**

We pray for those who are lonely or alone; for those who are made to feel they are foreigners in countries they have come to call home. We pray for those who, throughout the world are campaigning for Justice, human rights, and equality. We think especially of the events in America and those who are involved in the protests.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayers**

We pray that an effective treatment for COVID-19 be speedily found; for the research for a vaccine to be successful.

We pray for health care workers, that you may guide them and protect them.

We pray for the relevant government and health authorities; that the decisions they make are in the best interests of all their people.

Lord in your mercy, **hear our prayers**

Lord God, we entrust to you our lives, our families, communities and neighbourhoods.

In those moments when life is dark, keep us close to you.

When we are overcome with sadness, shelter us under your wings.

We bring these prayers in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour. **Amen**

StF 648

God to enfold you,

Christ to uphold you,

Spirit to keep you in heaven's sight:

so may God grace you,

heal and embrace you,

lead you through darkness

into the light.

John L. Bell (b.149)