

Bible Month: Ruth 2

Beckminster Methodist Church, Wolverhampton
Sunday, 14 June 2020

Prayer

We are the body of Christ.
Whether we are gathered in one place
Or dispersed throughout the world.
We are the body of Christ.

Hymn: Let Us Build a House Where Love Can Dwell STF 409

Let us build a house where love can dwell and all can safely live,
a place where saints and children tell how hearts learn to forgive.
Built of hopes and dreams and visions, rock of faith and vault of grace;
here the love of Christ shall end divisions:
All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where prophets speak, and words are strong and true,
where all God's children dare to seek to dream God's reign anew.
Here the cross shall stand as witness and as symbol of God's grace;
here as one we claim the faith of Jesus:
All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where love is found in water, wine and wheat:
a banquet hall on holy ground where peace and justice meet.
Here the love of God, through Jesus, is revealed in time and space;
as we share in Christ the feast that frees us:
All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where hands will reach beyond the wood and stone
to heal and strengthen, serve and teach, and live the Word they've known.
Here the outcast and the stranger bear the image of God's face;
let us bring an end to fear and danger:
All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Let us build a house where all are named, their songs and visions heard
and loved and treasured, taught and claimed as words within the Word.
Built of tears and cries of laughter, prayers of faith and songs of grace,
let this house proclaim from floor to rafter:
All are welcome, all are welcome, all are welcome in this place.

Marty Haugen

Prayer

God of grace, open our eyes to the beauty of your holiness, open our ears to the challenge of your Word, open our hearts that we might be filled with your Spirit and love generously as you love us. **Amen.**

Bible Reading: Ruth chapter 2 (New Revised Standard Version Anglicised)

Now Naomi had a kinsman on her husband's side, a prominent rich man, of the family of Elimelech, whose name was Boaz. ²And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, 'Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain, behind someone in whose sight I may find favour.' She said to her, 'Go, my daughter.' ³So she went. She came and gleaned in the field behind the reapers. As it happened, she came to the part of the field belonging to Boaz, who was of the family of Elimelech. ⁴Just then Boaz came from Bethlehem. He said to the reapers, 'The LORD be with you.' They answered, 'The LORD bless you.' ⁵Then Boaz said to his servant who was in charge of the reapers, 'To whom does this young woman belong?' ⁶The servant who was in charge of the reapers answered, 'She is the Moabite who came back with Naomi from the country of Moab.' ⁷She said, "Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the reapers." So she came, and she has been on her feet from early this morning until now, without resting even for a moment. ^[a]

⁸Then Boaz said to Ruth, 'Now listen, my daughter, do not go to glean in another field or leave this one, but keep close to my young women. ⁹Keep your eyes on the field that is being reaped, and follow behind them. I have ordered the young men not to bother you. If you get thirsty, go to the vessels and drink from what the young men have drawn.' ¹⁰Then she fell prostrate, with her face to the ground, and said to him, 'Why have I found favour in your sight, that you should take notice of me, when I am a foreigner?' ¹¹But Boaz answered her, 'All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. ¹²May the LORD reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!' ¹³Then she said, 'May I continue to find favour in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, even though I am not one of your servants.'

¹⁴At mealtime Boaz said to her, 'Come here, and eat some of this bread, and dip your morsel in the sour wine.' So she sat beside the reapers, and he heaped up for her some parched grain. She ate until she was satisfied, and she had some left over. ¹⁵When she got up to glean, Boaz instructed his young men, 'Let her glean even among the standing sheaves, and do not reproach her. ¹⁶You must also pull out some handfuls for her from the bundles, and leave them for her to glean, and do not rebuke her.'

¹⁷So she gleaned in the field until evening. Then she beat out what she had gleaned, and it was about an ephah of barley. ¹⁸She picked it up and came into the town, and her mother-in-law saw how much she had gleaned. Then she took out and gave her what was left over after she herself had been satisfied. ¹⁹Her mother-in-law said to her, 'Where did you glean today? And where have you worked? Blessed be the man who took notice of you.' So she told her mother-in-law with whom she had worked, and said, 'The name of the man with whom I worked today is Boaz.' ²⁰Then Naomi said to her daughter-in-law, 'Blessed be he by the LORD, whose kindness has not

forsaken the living or the dead!’ Naomi also said to her, ‘The man is a relative of ours, one of our nearest kin.’^[b] 21 Then Ruth the Moabite said, ‘He even said to me, “Stay close by my servants, until they have finished all my harvest.”’ 22 Naomi said to Ruth, her daughter-in-law, ‘It is better, my daughter, that you go out with his young women, otherwise you might be bothered in another field.’ 23 So she stayed close to the young women of Boaz, gleaning until the end of the barley and wheat harvests; and she lived with her mother-in-law.

Reflection

*Blessed be he by the Eternal One,
whose kindness has not forsaken the living or the dead (Ruth 2.20)**

Whether you live on your own, or with family; whether you have needed to keep going out to work, or to stay home; whether you are zooming with friends around the world, or enjoying the company of a good book, it's been a lonely few months. Working from home, I've missed not only colleagues but also friends made on the daily commute, familiar faces at the train station and welcome cups of coffee.

Recent studies have shown that both young and old are suffering from increased loneliness during the pandemic. We are not made to be alone - we know in our bones that it is not good for us (Genesis 2.18). Our grief for those who have died forgotten and out of sight, is as much that they lived alone as that they died alone. Yet in our sorrow and fear, we keep faith in a God who does not forsake the living or the dead.

Arriving into Bethlehem, Naomi and Ruth must have felt forsaken. Lacking food and friends, they seem forgotten. Even when Ruth ventures out into the fields to glean, she keeps her distance from the other workers. Homesick and alone, the poet John Keats imagines her ‘stood in tears amid the alien corn.’

Yet Ruth is not the loneliest character in our story.

We first meet Boaz surrounded by his workers and land. Wealthy and well established, we look to Boaz to restore Ruth and Naomi to society. And he does – but not before they restore him. While Ruth goes home to Naomi, Boaz has no one. We might read his invitation to Ruth to eat with him as motivated as much by loneliness as by generosity. In his encounters with Ruth, Boaz is helped to live out his faith. In his blessing of Ruth, he is blessed.

Boaz's faith is made visible not through his pious greetings but in the care he shows for Ruth, a poor migrant worker, struggling to get by. He does not overlook this strange woman, but instead sees her, speaks with her, and makes space for her in his field and at his table. In so doing, Boaz begins to enact the blessing he asks God to provide for Ruth.

Boaz's example encourages us to live out our faith with generosity and kindness. But the story also warns us about the dangers of being a 'pillar of society' (1 Kings 7.21). The text gently mocks Boaz for being too formal in his greetings, too verbose in his instructions, too cautious in his decisions. Initially, Boaz is most concerned to be seen as an upstanding citizen, fulfilling his moral duty. It is only when he comes to understand Ruth's vulnerability as a foreign woman that he is able to see what needs to change so that Ruth and Naomi can be fully part of the community.

Like Boaz, how might we listen to the voices of those on the margins of our society? How might we understand the urgent need for change? As we reflect on the protests against historic slavery and lasting racism, may we be architects of communities of justice and inclusion, rather than pillars of an unjust society.

May we be generous in our listening,
bold in our dreaming,
and faithful in our remembering of both the living and the dead.

*In our Bibles, the divine name YHWH is often replaced by LORD, but its meaning is more accurately translated as the One who Is, Being, or the Eternal One.

Rachel Starr

Across the Barriers

Living God, grant us the grace to see your image not just in those we know and like but in those across barriers of our making. Forgive the prejudices that divide and exclude, and help us to reflect your outrageous love that reaches out to embrace everyone. So may we truly follow Christ. **Amen**

(Chris Polhill *Holy Ground, Liturgies and Worship for an Engaged Spirituality* compiled by Neil Paynter and Helen Boothroyd Wild Goose Worship Group 2005)

The Lord's Prayer

With the confidence of the children of God we pray the prayer Jesus taught us...

Hymn: The Church of Christ in Every Age StF 415

The Church of Christ in every age beset by change but Spirit-led,
must claim and test its heritage and keep on rising from the dead.

Across the world, across the street, the victims of injustice cry
for shelter and for bread to eat, and never live until they die.

Then let the servant Church arise, a caring Church that longs to be
a partner in Christ's sacrifice, and clothed in Christ's humanity.

For he alone, whose blood was shed, can cure the fever in our blood,
and teach us how to share our bread and feed the starving multitude.

We have no mission but to serve in full obedience to our Lord:
to care for all, without reserve, and spread his liberating Word.
Fred Pratt Green

Sending Out

Serve your God with patience and with passion.
Be deliberate in enacting your faith.
Be steadfast in celebrating the Spirit's power.
And may peace be your way in the world. Amen.
United Methodist Worship Book 1993

Rev. Peggy Heim