

Bible Month Week 3
Beckminster Methodist Church
Sunday, 21 June 2020

Ruth Chapter 3.

‘The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.’ (Lamentations 3:22-23)

Holy God, as we come to worship you, help us to remember that, though apart, we belong to your church, your people, your world, and that we are not alone. Draw us together by your Spirit as we worship. **Amen.**

Hymn: (StF 455)

All my hope on God is founded;
He doth still my strength renew.
Me through change and chance he guideth,
only good and only true.
God unknown,
He alone
Calls my heart to be his own.

Human pride and earthly glory,
sword and crown betray our trust;
What with care and toil we fashion,
Tower and temple fall to dust.
But God’s power,
Hour by hour,
Is my temple and my tower.

Daily doth the almighty giver
Bounteous gifts on us bestow;
His desire our soul delighteth,
Pleasure leads where us where we go.
Love doth stand
At his hand;
Joy doth wait on his command

Robert Bridges *based on* Joachim Neander

Let us pray together

Holy and ever -loving God, we thank you for all the blessings that you have bestowed on us even in these unprecedented times. We thank you that we are able to reach each other through phone, Skype, Zoom and What’s app and that as the pandemic recedes as we pray it will we are able to see more of each other and hug our families and friends again.

We thank you that we can share in this Bible month the short book of Ruth; that we may find in this story of faithfulness, courage, fortitude and reliance, strength for ourselves to be

your faithful followers seeking to do what is best for those we know and love and for those we don't know.

May our flourishing never come at the expense of another. May we dream the impossible and find strength to fulfil our calling. Help us to find your presence with us every moment of every day; give us hope when we despair; bring peace to our unsettled minds and may we be equal to the challenge you set before us.

When we fail—forgive us.

Help us to live and love as your son our Saviour did. **Amen.**

Today's reading from the Old Testament is from the book of Ruth Chapter 3

Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, 'My daughter, I need to seek some security for you, so that it may be well with you. Now here is our kinsman Boaz, with whose young women you have been working. See, he is winnowing barley tonight at the threshing floor. Now wash and anoint yourself, and put on your best clothes and go down to the threshing-floor; but do not make yourself known to the man until he has finished eating and drinking. When he lies down, observe the place where he lies; then, go and uncover his feet and lie down; and he will tell you what to do.' She said to her, 'All that you tell me I will do.'

So she went down to the threshing-floor and did just as her mother-in-law had instructed her. When Boaz had eaten and drunk, and he was in a contented mood, he went to lie down at the end of the heap of grain. Then she came quietly and uncovered his feet, and lay down. At midnight the man was startled and turned over, and there, lying at his feet, was a woman! He said, 'Who are you?' And she answered, 'I am Ruth, your servant; spread your cloak over your servant, for you are next of-kin.' He said, 'May you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter; this last instance of your loyalty is better than the first; you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich. And now, my daughter, do not be afraid; I will do for you all that you ask, for all the assembly of my people know that you are a worthy woman. But now, though it is true that I am a near kinsman, there is another kinsman more closely related than I. Remain this night, and in the morning, if he will act as next-of-kin for you, good; let him do so. If he is not willing to act as next-of-kin for you, then, as the Lord lives, I will act as next-of-kin for you. Lie down until the morning.'

So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before one person could recognize another; for he said, 'It must not be known that the woman came to the threshing-floor.' Then he said, 'Bring the cloak you are wearing and hold it out.' So she held it, and he measured out six measures of barley, and put it on her back; then he went into the city. She came to her mother-in-law, who said, 'How did things go with you, my daughter?' Then she told her all that the man had done for her, saying, 'He gave me these six measures of barley, for he said, "Do not go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed." She replied, 'Wait, my daughter, until you learn how the matter turns out, for the man will not rest, but will settle the matter today.'

Time to Reflect

I need to seek some rest for you (Ruth 3.1)

It was three in the morning, but on the Rio metro the party showed no sign of stopping. Carnival made night, day; strangers, friends; and anything not encrusted with sequins, inappropriate dress for such celebrations.

I've been lucky enough to be in Rio de Janeiro for carnival not once but twice. I've seen the energy and effort needed by the performers to keep going, dancing non-stop for an hour or more as they parade the length of the Sambódromo. Just beyond view of the judges, as each group crosses the finish line, dancers collapse onto the floor, throwing off the weight of their costumes and roles. For a brief moment, we are dazzled by the colour, music and glitter, caught up in the fantasia (as the costumes are called). For a brief moment, we are distracted from the violence, inequality and poverty of this city and so many others.

Dressing up, drunkenness and deception, you may be surprised to hear, are key elements of the third chapter of Ruth, our focus for this week. Indeed, we might read Ruth as a carnival story - a comic folk-tale in which, for a brief moment, chaos and confusion rule.

Whereas in chapter 2, Ruth shares stories and food with Boaz in the company of others, this next encounter takes place at midnight, beyond the city walls and outside of social norms. With the harvest gathered, the revelry begins. Long into the night, Boaz and his workers eat, drink and make merry. Finally, Boaz falls asleep on the threshing-floor alongside his men. And waiting at the wings, ready to play her part, is Ruth.

Some might describe Ruth as foolish – a young woman venturing into the male space of the threshing-floor; a stranger stepping outside the city walls. But without food or friends, Naomi and Ruth are desperate. For the two widows, the carnival atmosphere provides a brief opportunity for action. With social rules temporarily relaxed, there is space for Ruth to try out a new role for herself – that of Boaz's wife.

Between them, the women make things happen. In their struggle to survive, they are alert to what needs to be done. In Marc Chagall's painting, 'Ruth at the feet of Boaz' (1960), Ruth lies under the moon, wide awake and alert.

Perhaps you can relate to Ruth. Perhaps you are also finding it difficult to relax at the moment. Worried about our health, work or relationships; worried for ourselves, our families and our world, many of us are having trouble sleeping. Just as we seek rest, so does Naomi for Ruth and herself (verse 1, in the NRSV 'security'), and she looks to Boaz to secure it (verse 18). As Boaz spreads out his cloak to protect and provide for Ruth, so too, suggests the text, will God gather us safely under her wings.

Unlike Boaz, Ruth has little power or influence, instead she must work in the shadows, subverting the established order and seeking new ways forward to secure justice and peace. In a different way to Boaz, Ruth also reveals something of the redeeming work of God. Like Ruth, God meets us in the darkness, and we ask 'who are you?'

As Augustine encouraged us, may our hearts be restless until we find our rest in the God who calls us into ever deeper and more daring ways of living out our faith.

Rachel Starr

A time of prayer

Listen for the voice of the Lord

In a world full of inequalities and injustice; where the society we live in is still plagued by racism and disadvantage, where people are hungry for bread or for the truth; where life is threatened by the powerful; where there is a need to be fulfilled-

God calls, 'Who will speak up for us?

Here am I: Use me

Listen for the voice of the Lord

Where people are sick, in body or in mind: where care and friendship are needed; Where the bereaved need comfort, and the lonely a friend

God calls, Who will speak up for us?

Here am I: Use me

Where there is strife and aggression in homes or on the streets because of lockdown, where children are disadvantaged because of the lack of education and mental health support, where families are despairing because their livelihood is being destroyed by the inability to work and the financial crisis,

God calls: Who will speak up for us?

Here am I: Use me!

Where people are despairing across the world we have forgotten; where the news of disasters is drowned out by our own fears; for those who need our help and support in prayers and gifts, help us to be their hope

God calls, Who will go for us?

Here am I: Energise me to be generous!

Where there is good news to be shared, bringing life in all its fullness, and where there should be joy

God calls, Who will go for us?

Here am I: Use me!

(based on a prayer by Jo Williams)

God of hope, embracing us, surprising us, loving us, be near. **Amen.**

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father ...

Hymn: (StF 728)

O God, you search me and you know me. All my thoughts lie open to your gaze.
When I walk or lie down you are before me: ever the maker and keeper of my days.

You know my resting and my rising. You discern my purpose from afar,
and with love everlasting you besiege me: in every moment of life or death, you are.

Before a word is on my tongue, Lord, you have known its meaning through and through.
You are with me beyond my understanding: God of my present, my past and future, too.

Although your Spirit is upon me, still I search for shelter from your light.
There is nowhere on earth I can escape you: even the darkness is radiant in your sight.

For you created me and shaped me, gave me life within my mother's womb.
For the wonder of who I am, I praise you: safe in your hands, all creation is made new.

Bernadette Farrell (b. 1957) based on Psalm 139

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=2&v=ciyUOkm-js&feature=emb_logo

A prayer of blessing

May the Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. (Numbers 6:24-26). **Amen.**

‘Ideas inspired by Rev Miriam Moul and Jo Williams’

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Janet Anderson