

Bible Month Week 4
Beckminster Methodist Church
Sunday, 28 June 2020

Lord of Heaven and earth, you sent your Holy Spirit to be the life and power of your church.
Sow in our hearts the seeds of your Grace that we may bear the fruit of the Spirit, in love
and joy and peace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

StF 462

Come with me, come wander, come welcome the world
Where strangers might smile or where stones might be hurled;
Come leave what you cling to, lay down what you clutch
And find, with hands empty, that hearts can hold much.

Chorus: *Sing hey for the carpenter leaving his tools!*
 Sing hey for the pharisees leaving their rules!
 Sing hey for the fishermen leaving their nets!
 Sing hey for the people who leave their regrets!

Come walk in my company, come sleep by my side,
Come savour a lifestyle with nothing to hide;
Come sit at my table and eat with my friends,
Discovering a love which the world never ends.

Come share in my laughter, come close to my fears,
Come find yourself washed with the kiss of my tears;
Come stand close at hand while I suffer and die
And find in three days how I never will lie.

Come leave your possessions, come share out your treasure,
Come give and receive without method or measure;
Come loose every bond that's resisting the Spirit;
Enabling the earth to be yours to inherit.

Prayer of Adoration

God, our hiding place, our homecoming, You surround us with shouts of deliverance.
Shout for joy, all you who are true of heart; be glad and rejoice in the Lord
You are like a beacon in the darkness, a lighthouse in a sea boiling and raging,
A place where we can find our bearings and plan new journeys.
Shout for joy, all you who are true of heart; be glad and rejoice in the Lord.
Lord you bring home the wanderer, and party with those who repent,
Your love knows no limits'
We rejoice that when we stray, you come seeking us.
Shout for joy, all you who are true of heart, be glad and rejoice in the Lord.

Lessons: Ruth chapter 4
 Luke 15: Verses 11 - 31

Reflection

We are witnesses (Ruth 4.11)

There's a line in one of my childhood books that goes something like this:

'As the Golden Doll tumbled into little Jessica's arms, all her dreams came true.'

Reading the final chapter of the book of Ruth, I've been wondering, is that how Naomi felt as she once again held a child in her arms?

Naomi is the last character to come into focus in our journey through the book. Some describe her as a difficult character – indeed, Naomi says as much herself. 'Call me Bitter' she tells her friends on her return to Bethlehem (1.20). She often seems angry or disappointed in those around her – including God. She complains about how life has treated her. Full of her own emptiness, she seems unable to see what she does have – portraying herself as a lone figure, despite the companionship of Ruth.

Naomi doesn't seem an easy character to like, or to live with. Indeed, some readings of the story suggest that the older woman takes advantage of Ruth's vulnerability as a young foreign woman: putting her to work in Boaz's fields and on his threshing-floor.

If we have been taught to read Ruth as a romance between Ruth and Boaz, Naomi would seem a secondary character at best. In such readings, Naomi's is first mother-in-law and then matchmaker, keen to set up her daughter-in-law with the eligible bachelor of Bethlehem.

Miserable, manipulative or marriage-broker - How do we see Naomi?

Perhaps we need to take a different look.

It seems to me that Naomi's story is – at its beginning, middle and end – shaped primarily by loss. Naomi's grief overwhelms her. Her husband and sons dead, she can hardly find her way back to Bethlehem. As she stumbles along the road, not even the kindest daughters-in-law can comfort her. And on arrival back home, not even her oldest friends can sustain her. Like all of us, she longs to be full again, but however much grain Ruth brings back to her, she is still hungry.

Like Naomi, many of us are longing to embrace those we love. We want to hug friends and family members, to hold in our arms grandchildren or godchildren. We are tired of feeling sad and alone.

But like Naomi, our grief is not easily overcome. We may have lost loved ones over these past few months. Or it may be that during lockdown we have missed even more acutely those who we have already lost. We may be grieving the loss of jobs or savings, or the cancellation of holidays or celebrations. In our own way, we are grief-stricken.

So back to Jessica and her golden doll. In actual fact, in my childhood book, Jessica is only a character in a storybook. And Jessica's fairy-tale ending is contrasted with the reality of ordinary everyday life with its ups and downs, minor frustrations and joyful moments.

Although the book of Ruth ends with Naomi holding the child Obed in her arms, she still grieves for her husband and sons. There is no neat and perfect ending to her story. So too, at the end of our Covid-19 story, we will continue to grieve for all that is lost, for ourselves and for others.

We are witnesses, say the people gathered around Naomi, Ruth and Boaz as their story draws to a close. Let us bear witness also: to what has been lost, to what needs repairing, to what needs healing – in our own lives and the lives of all.

Let us bear witness to the need – within our church, our country and our world – for justice, equality, peace and hope. We are witnesses.

Rachel Starr

StF 701

Heaven shall not wait
for the poor to lose their patience,
the scorned to smile, the despised to find a friend:
Jesus is Lord;
He has championed the unwanted;
in Him injustice confronts its timely end.

Heaven shall not wait
for the rich to share their fortunes,
the proud to fall, the elite to tend the least
Jesus in Lord;
He has shown the master's privilege-
to kneel and wash servant's feet before they feast.

Heaven shall not wait
for the dawn of great ideas,
thoughts of compassion divorced from cries of pain:
Jesus is Lord;
He has married word and action;
His cross and company make His purpose plain.

Heaven shall not wait
for triumphant Hallelujahs,
when earth has passed and we reach another shore:
Jesus is Lord
In our present imperfection;
His power and love are for now, and then for ever more.

Prayers

Thanksgiving

Most loving God, creator of all that is good, we thank you for all that is good,, that in Jesus Christ you have shown us that your purposes in the world are of grace and love, that in His ministry, His death and resurrection, he promised us the fullness of life. We thank you for the Holy Spirit's gifts to us that equip us to serve the world, and to proclaim the Good News. Help us to to be Jesus' disciples and follow His way. **Amen.**

Intercessions

We pray for the world in its need.

For those with power and responsibility, that they may be faithful, and seek the good, and serve with integrity.

For all those who have been dispossessed and seek a new home, for refugees and asylum seekers, for victims of violence and war, for the persecuted .

For the homeless, and the hungry, for those who are abused, for those without work.

For those who are ill, those who mourn, the lonely and neglected, those filled with despair.

For the church, that it may respond to need and seek justice and peace, and show love in its life and actions.

For individuals on our hearts and minds.

Your Kingdom come, your will be done; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.**

StF 459

Captain of Israel's host and Guide
of all who seek the land above,
Beneath your shadow we abide,
the cloud of your protecting love;
Our strength, your grace; our rule, your word;
our end, the glory of the Lord.

By your unerring Spirit led,
we shall not in the desert stray;
We shall not full direction need,
nor miss our providential way,
As far from danger as from fear,
while love, almighty love, is near.

Blessing

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 from darkness into the light.
And the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you now and always. **Amen.**

Rev. Glennys Bamford

