

Hadleigh URC Mid-week Service, Weds 30th September 2020 (Claire Coster)

Good morning and welcome to our time of worship and prayer this morning.

We will begin by singing in our hearts and heads **For the Beauty of the Earth**

The story of Naomi and Ruth is one of my favourite Old Testament stories and I wanted to share with you some of the thoughts of Elizabeth Rundle who has written a 14 day reflection on Ruth in my Bible Reading notes.

The heart warming book of Ruth gives us one of the most complete and uplifting stories in the Old Testament. Even though it is a comparatively slim book, Ruth's story is crammed with truth, both theological and social. It portrays the truth of God's loving providence and the truth that the witness of a faithful believer has power to change lives.

There are just four chapters and reading from a version of the Bible such as The Message makes it both easy to read and relevant for today's reader. We don't have to be scholars to warm to this riches to rags to riches account from another age and culture.

As we read the account, we see how the lives of two women, Ruth and her mother-in-law Naomi, are inextricably linked. Is this a prompt for us to look at our own lives and recognise the influence, support and love given to us by family or friends? It is also a vivid reminder that complex issues in Ruth's time have their contemporary counterparts: the ravages of famine, disease, bereavement, racial discrimination, infertility, the treatment of strangers, mixed marriages and the human spirit for survival.

So let's hear a passage from Ruth now. **The reading is from the Ruth 2: 2 – 13**

Millions of refugees in the world today struggle with life and role reversal. But it is also a situation that at any time, through reasons of finance, health or age, any of us could experience. Naomi had left Bethlehem in the protection of her husband; she returned older and suffering from triple bereavement, the same woman, yet altered by circumstances beyond her control. Ruth, the once-happy bride, was reduced to uncertain prospects of a migrant worker. The roles of these two women were reversed by tragedy.

The author makes it clear to the reader the awful plight of Naomi and Ruth. Although in reduced circumstances, Naomi remained the matriarch from whom Ruth needed permission to do things. The very mention of left overs gives a stark illustration of the depth of their poverty. They were next door to beggars. In Leviticus 19: 9-10 we find provision laid down in the law of Moses specifically for such needs. This was God-inspired social altruism. Ruth's last words to Naomi here hold the poignant

recognition that, as a foreign woman, she would not be safe in everyone's fields. What a stain on civilisation that the same is true today.

In those times barley and wheat were sown in the autumn, with barley, the staple of the poor ripening first. Women who followed the harvesters to glean were followed by Ruth. In her changed role Ruth showed that she was not afraid of hard work in her responsibility for her mother-in-law.

We have much to learn from Naomi and Ruth:

- loyalty and commitment to family and God
- listening and acting on advice from older more experienced folks
- remembering those who are strangers in our land and making sure they are protected
- making sure we are not greedy and ensuring that there is enough to share with those in need
- not being afraid to work hard to fulfil our responsibilities
- being thankful when grace and kindness are shown to us
- God uses situations for good – Ruth married Boaz and they were the great grandparents of David. Ruth is mentioned in Matthew's account of Jesus' genealogy

On Sunday we brought to Church items of food and hygiene products to share with those in need both in this country and refugees in other countries. We thank God that we were able to do that. We also pray that we can work for a better world in which justice and trade work for a fairer distribution of the world's goods.

Now we come to a time of prayer:

Lord we thank you for the harvest this year,

For those involved in planting and growing crops around the world,

For those who love to garden and enjoy the fruits of their labours

For those who love to cook and be creative in the kitchen.

For those who love to eat and share meals with family and friends.

We thank you for the volunteers involved in FIND and the Hadleigh Foodbank.

May those who receive a gift this week, month or year be blessed and we pray that we will all work for a fairer distribution of wealth so that people do not need to use foodbanks.

We pray especially for those who have recently lost their jobs through redundancy and are worrying about how they are going to pay their bills and feed themselves and their family.

We pray for those who are bereaved, especially those who have lost loved ones in the last week.

We pray for those who have asked for prayer in our prayer book and name them before you now:

We pray for those who live in Market Place, Victoria House, Church Street, Queen Street, Pound Lane, Church Walk and Hadleigh Hall. May they feel your loving arms around them at this time.

Finally we pray for refugees around the world. Thank you for this collection of toiletries to help them in their time of need. BUT we need to work for justice for these people and help them to find a place to call home where they can be welcomed and work hard to fulfil their responsibilities. May we all be more like Boaz and welcome the stranger in our midst.

We will finish our time of prayer by saying the Lord's Prayer together.

Our final hymn to reflect upon is [When I needed a neighbour ...](#)

A prayer by Rachel Poolman

We raise our eyes to the cross
and see the Christ who emptied himself
pouring out newness of life.

We raise our hearts to heaven
and receive the embrace of the Spirit
overflowing with compassion.

We stretch our arms towards the world
and find them grasped by the Creator,
energising us with hope and love.

We worship, we adore,

we give thanks, and we will respond.

Amen