

## Ruth 1: 11 – 22

But Naomi said, 'Return home, my daughters. Why would you come with me? Am I going to have any more sons, who could become your husbands? <sup>12</sup> Return home, my daughters; I am too old to have another husband. Even if I thought there was still hope for me – even if I had a husband tonight and then gave birth to sons – <sup>13</sup> would you wait until they grew up? Would you remain unmarried for them? No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the LORD's hand has turned against me!'

<sup>14</sup> At this they wept aloud again. Then Orpah kissed her mother-in-law goodbye, but Ruth clung to her.

<sup>15</sup> 'Look,' said Naomi, 'your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.'

<sup>16</sup> But Ruth replied, 'Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. <sup>17</sup> Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.' <sup>18</sup> When Naomi realised that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

<sup>19</sup> So the two women went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they arrived in Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them, and the women exclaimed, 'Can this be Naomi?'

<sup>20</sup> 'Don't call me Naomi,'<sup>[b]</sup> she told them. 'Call me Mara,<sup>[c]</sup> because the Almighty<sup>[d]</sup> has made my life very bitter. <sup>21</sup> I went away full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The LORD has afflicted<sup>[e]</sup> me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.'

<sup>22</sup> So Naomi returned from Moab accompanied by Ruth the Moabite, her daughter-in-law, arriving in Bethlehem as the barley harvest was beginning.

## Acts 2. 14a, 36 – 41

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: 'Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say.

'Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah.'

<sup>37</sup> When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'

<sup>38</sup> Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptised, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

<sup>39</sup> The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off – for all whom the Lord our God will call.'

<sup>40</sup> With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, 'Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.'<sup>41</sup> Those who accepted his message were baptised, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.

## **Sermon 19<sup>th</sup> April 2020 Livestream, Widford**

When we chose these passages for today, they were because we were going to be united as a church fellowship while our Widford parish church, St Marys, was being decorated. After waiting years for permission to decorate, it's now the virus which has prevented progress! But we will get there, and we will be decorated as soon as we are able.

So let's turn to this beautiful story. Ruth is such a short book – why not try to read it this week. It's a love story in so many ways – but it starts off very sadly. Here we find Naomi, her husband has died and since then her two sons have also died, leaving her alone with two daughters in law.

I thought about our situation in the world, so much sadness and tragedy – everywhere we look on the news, everywhere we look in the world. We have not experienced so much tragedy in many years, and neither had Naomi. Naomi decided to change her name, because of all the sadness she found herself in – she called herself Mara, which means bitter.

**Today we are going to have three thoughts about these passages: Green shoots, Spiritual character, and ancestry.**

### **First Green shoots:**

And so we look at Naomi, and we might ask how can you be bitter – and yet, as we look around us, perhaps we can understand. Naomi cried out to God in her weakness and vulnerability, as so many people are doing in this country now. Naomi was now a widow. She was the lowest of the low, and was only protected at all because she was a Jew. But she lived in Moab, having moved there with her husband when there was a famine in Israel. While they lived in Moab they had a family, two sons, and when they grew up they married women from Moab; Ruth and Orpah. Because Naomi had no family in Moab, she would be on her own, and so she decided that it would be best to go back to Bethlehem, where she had come from.

She suggested to her daughters in law that they should stay in their home with their people in Moab, which Orpah decided to do, but Ruth loved Naomi, and could not bare to think of her journeying alone and then trying to find a way to settle back in her home town. From tragedy we see green shoots of life and love. In the tragedy of

all their men dying, Ruth rises up, with warmth and love to protect her mother in law, and keep her company.

As this virus has swept the world, lock down has enabled the majority of people to be kept safe. It is not nice, it is not what we would choose, but it has saved many lives.

As people have cried out for PPE, companies have come forward willing to set up their sewing rooms and help.

As people have cried out for workers in the fields, hundreds are volunteering, and will be taught by the many workers that have worked in the fields in the past in order that crops are not lost.

Roger was poorly a few weeks ago. He is making steady progress back to good health – he had a conversation with a doctor over the phone who diagnosed him and provided suitable medication.

As we have cried out for respirators, they are being made, and some will be made at the Ford plant in Dagenham, which makes us proud.

Out of the tragedies of our life green shoots do come, and as we cry out in pain, and hurt to our God, he does listen, and works through the many hands and feet of those who will respond.

Jen sent me a lovely story from a family in Nicaragua. On March 21<sup>st</sup> a missionary worker in Nicaragua prayed to God to show her a way to help in this time of corona virus. That evening she received a message from a missionary colleague who had been contacted by a man in Colorado, who years ago had tried to ship a container to Nicaragua. It had been very complicated. The e-mail contacts started back in 2015 after a man had visited Nicaragua and when he got home God laid on his heart to fill a container with medical supplies and send it. The container arrived in 2019, but it did not have the correct paperwork to be released into Nicaragua and no one had heard about the container since then.

The missionary worker found out which port the crate had been imported to and set off to find out more. They asked the customs officer for her help and she was able to trace the arrival of the crate, but confirmed that the paperwork had been incomplete on the crate and that the crate had been sent for auction.

She checked through her files, but she could not find a date for the auction. They went round to the warehouse manager and he was able to locate the crate still complete with all its cargo.

They have since unloaded the items, 980 items, medical equipment, medical face masks, i.c.u. beds, i.v. poles, oxygen concentrate, 50,000 masks, 44,000 gloves, 2,000 hospital gowns and it goes on. 19 public hospitals are now benefitting from the equipment. Green shoots for Nicaragua.

## Spiritual character

Naomi was a Jewish woman. She would have lived her life in the Jewish traditional way, and her sons and daughter in laws shared in that way of living too. Ruth was from Moab, but she chose to come back with Naomi to Bethlehem. She says to Naomi, chapter 1 verse 16; 'Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. <sup>17</sup> Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the LORD deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me.' Naomi was very moved that Ruth was keen to honour our God, accept him as Lord of her life and live as a God fearing woman, joining her heart to that of Naomi and sharing in loving and caring for her. As a book in the Bible the story of Ruth is a sharp reminder that Our God has always been interested in all people, whoever they are and wherever they come from – that the key point is that we recognise God as Lord of our lives and live as best we can in his way. He calls us all, and we are free to make that choice.

In that story from Acts, Peter, who had suffered badly through the death of Jesus, fearing for his own life, and struggling with the reality of what happened – I think we would have struggled too! – stood outside the room in which all of the disciples had huddled together and addressed the crowd standing outside in Jerusalem: He explained to them that God had sent Jesus, to show us how much God loves us, to show us how to live, and how to be community one with another – and then when Peter went on to explain that it was Jesus that everyone had joined together in crucifying the people were heart broken, and wanted to know what to do and how to put it right. And Peter seeing their grief knew from his own experience of a loving relationship with Jesus that all that was needed was to say sorry, and to come forward and get Baptised, and the disciples joined together while God filled them with his Holy Spirit. That day 3,000 people got Baptised and believed.

Ruth's spiritual character grew in the story – she showed loyalty, friendship and commitment to her relationship with Naomi initially, and then to our Father God as she explored her relationship with him, trusted him and then followed him.

Naomi had spiritual character – keeping her loyalty to Father God in Moab, being willing to set free her daughters in law in order that they could start a new life without her being a burden to them, and then being prepared to journey home. She wrestled with God, and God honoured her with many blessings.

Peter had spiritual character – this man who had been so sad, full of remorse, because he denied that he knew Jesus, was reconciled in love to Jesus. Peter knew first hand all about saying sorry, and establishing a right relationship again. He emerged from the room that the disciples were still hiding away in – to speak to the people outside the door – and as he spoke he drew a crowd and he took his opportunity. Peter went on to be a rock – teaching us how to be rooted in the Christian faith, reliable and responsible.

## **Ancestry:**

Have you ever taken the time to trace your family tree. We have a few on the go with different members of the family who have worked hard trying to keep the line and find out our ancestry, where we come from and who we are connected to. I know that some people can have some nice surprises, and then if you have ever seen the programme Who do you think you are? Some of the programmes are very moving and emotional for the celebrity involved as they discover the truth about their ancestry.

I wonder if Ruth knew that through her love and devotion to Naomi and our father God, she would find love and a family life with Boaz. They had a baby, Obed, who was father of Jesse and grandfather of King David.

Now we all know the importance of David's line – we hear all about that at Christmas every year – and so Ruth, this young Moabitess, was accepted and loved into the family of God, she became the great grandmother of King David, and consequently a direct ancestor of Jesus.

How amazing – what a story, what faith and hope – from nothing. This story gives us all hope, and reminds each one of us, that we are all special in the sight of our Father God.

Today we have thought about green shoots – take some time to think about them – let them stir up the hope in you – keep you strong in this changing and challenging world.

We have thought about spiritual character – we might not think we amount to much – but God takes us just as we are and works with us, as we learn to depend more and more on him.

We have considered our ancestry – you might be delighted with yours – or not – it is just interesting – but this we do know – we are all adopted into Gods family – the church – and we long to get back together – and find new ways to grow in his love together – keep praying – keep hoping. Amen.