

LANGBANK PARISH CHURCH

27 September 2020



Ruth and Naomi

With our Harvest Thanksgiving Service taking place next week, we begin the Harvest Season with the story of Ruth and Naomi. Our service theme is 'Faithfulness'.

CALL TO PRAYER

**Let love and faithfulness never leave you
Bind them around your neck
Write them on the tablet of your heart**

Let us pray

Lord of the morning,
and of all our days and nights,
we come today to praise you.
and to thank you
for the care you give us,
every day.

We praise you,
for you are Maker
of all we see and know,
giver of all good gifts
and Father of us all.

You are Friend in all our lives,
embracing us with strength and hope.
And you are the Good Shepherd
of all our days,
who is with us always.
and faithfully guides us
at every crossroad in our lives.

Forgive us our sins this week
the things we have said and done
that have hurt others
and the things we have failed to say and do
that would have blessed the world.
Forgive us for thinking too much about ourselves
for therein lies the seeds of our destruction.

Help us, this week,
to be more faithful to the task you set us
which is to love you
and love the world as you do.

Help us to see the world as you do
a world where everybody matters
and no—one is left out.

Help us, that we may fulfil our purpose
as disciples of your Son, Jesus,
who taught us to pray together, saying,
Our Father who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

and forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation,
but deliver us from evil

For thine is the kingdom, the power,
and the glory, for ever. *Amen*

We sing now of God's unfailing love to us.....

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MwqahDvURsQ>

The King of love my shepherd is
whose goodness faileth never
I nothing lack if I am his
and he is mine for ever.

Where streams of living water flow
my ransomed soul he leadeth
and where the verdant pastures grow
with food celestial feedeth

Perverse and foolish oft I strayed
but yet in love he sought me
and on his shoulder gently laid
and home rejoicing brought me.

And so through all the length of days
thy goodness faileth never:
Good Shepherd, may I sing thy praise
within thy house for ever!

READING : Ruth Chapter 1 (abridged)

Introduction

The Book of Ruth is a story of faithfulness, love and fulfilment, and was traditionally read at the summer Harvest. It is set in a rare time of peace, when borders were open between Israel and her neighbour, Moab.....

Back in the days when Judges led Israel— there was a famine in the land. A man from Bethlehem in Judah left home with his wife and his two sons to live in the country of Moab. The man's name was Elimelech; his wife's name was Naomi. Elimelech died and Naomi and her two sons were left.

The sons took Moabite wives; the name of the first was Orpah, the second, Ruth. They lived in Moab for the next ten years. But then the two sons died and Naomi was left with neither husband nor sons.

One day Naomi decided to leave the country of Moab and set out for home because she had heard that GOD had blessed them with food. And so, with her two daughters-in-law, she set out on the road back to the land of Judah.

After a short while, Naomi turned to Orpah and Ruth, saying

“Go back. Go home and live with your mothers.
And may GOD treat you as graciously as you treated your husbands and myself.
And may GOD give each of you a new home and a new husband!”

She kissed them and they cried openly, saying,

No, we’re coming with you to your people.”

But Naomi was firm:

“Go back, my dear daughters.

Why would you come with me?”

I am too old to marry again.

And I am empty and bitter, for the Lord has dealt harshly with me.

Again they cried openly. Eventually, Orpah kissed her mother-in-law good-bye; but Ruth clung to her. Naomi spoke to her again,

“See, Ruth, your sister-in-law is going back to her people and to her gods.
Go with her.”

But Ruth said:

“Do not press me to leave you
or to turn back from following you!

Where you go, I will go;

where you lodge, I will lodge;

your people shall be my people

and your God my God.

Where you die, I will die –

and there will I be buried.

May the Lord do thus and so to me,
and more as well.”

When Naomi saw that Ruth had her heart set on going with her, she gave in.

And so, the two of them travelled on together and arrived at Bethlehem at the start of the Barley Harvest.

REFLECTION

I wonder if you've heard this one before?

Two men were in the pub.
One says to his mate, "My mother in law is an angel"
His friend replies, "You're lucky! Mine is still alive!"

or, how about this one?

My mother in law fell down a wishing well.
I was amazed! I never knew they worked!

The question is, Why do others in law come in for such a roasting?

Is it because.....

While Dads are happy to wish the young couple luck and otherwise stand back – job done – Mums find it really hard to see their sons being organised or criticised by another woman. And where the mother-daughter relationship is really close, husbands can feel excluded, and even ganged-up on!

I think that one is particularly true – there are plenty of young women who confide in their mums first and foremost, visit or phone them at least once a day, and rely on them for emotional support throughout their lives. I've picked up this week that one of the strongest complaints about the new lockdown is from men and women who can no longer go and see their mums. Hardly surprising, perhaps, that some spouses react with a bit of inappropriate humour.

But humour was not remotely on the agenda as the three women set off on the road from Moab to Bethlehem. Naomi was the mother in law of both Orpah and Ruth, and they walked along, heads down.... three women bound in the reality of loss, now returning, reluctantly, as asylum seekers to Naomi's home town.

For Naomi there was little choice but to return to Israel, where custom dictated that she would be protected at some basic level by her kinsfolk. But, for Orpah and Ruth, the opposite was true.

They were Moabite women, with Mums and Dads back home. Young, and unencumbered by another man's children, they could marry again, have a future in their own country – as Naomi suggested.

The moment was a crossroads for them all.

First, Naomi's unselfish decision to release her daughters in law from any family obligation to look after her. Second, after much persuasion, Orpah's decision to turn back. It would be Goodbye forever – for they would never see each other again. And, finally, Ruth's decision to stay with Naomi, whatever the future held..

Ruth's loyalty to her mother-in-law never wavered. Her place was by Naomi's side and they would face the future together. Choosing as she does, Ruth commits herself to be her mother in law's companion till death parts them.... and she expresses herself in one of the most moving speeches in the Bible....

"Intreat me not to leave thee,
or to return from following after thee:
for whither thou goest, I will go;
and where thou lodgest, I will lodge:
thy people shall be my people,
and thy God my God:"

By the end of the Book, we will see that **Ruth's** words are also prophetic... For the decision will eventually open up to her a new life of love and laughter and her **loyalty** will be rewarded a hundredfold.

Faithfulness is one of the Bible's mega themes. The vast majority of the first book of the Bible, Genesis, is the story of Abraham and his family – the Pioneers of Faith. And, in the Gospels, Jesus spoke often, and in many different ways, of the importance of faithfulness in relationships..... without Trust we would never move forward! Sometimes Jesus' teaching is straightforward, but sometimes his examples cast an unusual slant on the meaning of faith and faithfulness. Jesus spoke often of the importance of faithfulness in relationships – so that trust would not be destroyed. Sometimes his examples take us by surprise.

In the well known Parable of the Talents, for instance, the Good and Faithful Servants were the ones who invested wisely and doubled their Master's money. Faithfulness to God means NOT standing still, not turning back to the past but taking a chance on a better future. The journey of Faith is always a journey towards the unknown, and faithfulness means sharing someone else's journey.

Paul says that, as Christians, "We walk by faith, not sight" and I think that this is very true in times of uncertainty. When the seas are rough and the sky dark and our gadgets and statistics don't work and we can't see where we are, let alone where we're heading – REMEMBER THEN that we have a pilot on board who will quietly steer our boat, if we only trust him.

The word 'gospel' is not confined to the writings of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Gospel describes any journey from Trouble to Grace – which makes The Book of Ruth pure gospel. Ruth's journey with Naomi and Orpah begins in sadness but the decision each makes to go or to stay brings some sort of peaceful resolution. Ruth and Naomi now set off for Bethlehem, stronger in their newly-defined relationship. They will arrive for the start of the barley harvest, a time of plenty, a time of fulfilment.

We cannot pretend we don't live in a time of uncertainty.. The normal predictability of our days may well be interrupted by the financial downturn or illness of ourselves or a loved one, and the restrictions we live under just make everything harder. But the lives that we have always led, the love that we have always borne, the faithfulness we have always shared and the direction we have always followed - will determine whether we find inner peace, and the strength to keep going towards the future, like Ruth and Naomi.

We know that God is good, and that he is faithful, because we have often experienced his goodness in our lives. Now, even as we hunker down against dark evenings, we go in faith, as we always have. We represent the church family in Langbank. We travel, some of us from a place of sadness, or confusion - towards a graceful future, and we leave no-one behind.

PRAYERS OF THANKSGIVING, INTERCESSION AND DEDICATION

Let us pray,

O God of all our journeys
we thank you for the companions of our lives
those with whom we share
our going out and our coming in,
those with whom we share
the ordinary, funny things of life
as well as our deepest thoughts.
May we always be faithful to them
as you are always faithful to us.

In this season of Harvest,
we pray for all who journey in hope,
towards a better future –
and for those who journey in despair,
leaving everything behind and fleeing
from terrorism, or individual acts of violence.

We pray for those who protect us,
and remember especially today
the family of Sgt Matt Ratana
who was murdered in Croydon
Police Station on Friday.

We pray for all who journey as a way of life,
traders, nomads, farmers taking livestock to market...
and for those in the haulage industry
who bring food and medicines
and all manner of imported goods
to our shops - and ultimately to our homes.
We think of them especially as they prepare
for Brexit amidst the confusion of the politics.

We pray for our own part of the world
and for the people who live here.

We pray for those who will soon be married
and start a new journey in their lives together.
Give them great joy in each other
and joy in their wedding preparations.

Lord Jesus,
knowing that the suffering
are very dear to you
we pray now for those who have lost loved ones,
for the fearful, the lonely and the frail.
We pray for Carers, who give, and give,
and ask for nothing
but the peace of those they care for.

We pray for Rona, as she receives therapy
in the Larkfield Unit
and Margaret and others
who are recovering at home.
Bless their families – those faithful husbands,
wives, and children who walk alongside.

Lord, gather them in our hearts
as we remember them quietly now...
along with any whom we know
who need our prayers today....

Lord,
You are the source of all life
and our companion on Way.
And we have gladly brought to you our money
that others may also come to know your love.
As we ask your blessing on it now
we dedicate ourselves to your service
in the week ahead.
As you used the strength of our youth,
use now the wisdom of our older years
that we may be channels of your peace
in a world that longs for peace. *Amen*

INTIMATIONS

1 Our Harvest Thanksgiving Service will be next Sunday, 4 October. Harvest gifts of non-perishable food, toiletries, etc can be brought in bags and laid on our Harvest Table, as you come into the sanctuary. If this is difficult to arrange, please bring money in an envelope and Graham will buy supplies on behalf of the church. Graham will later take all our Harvest Gifts to the Glasgow City Mission Foodbank.

2 The Wednesday Zoom Group are having a break for a few weeks, re-starting in mid-October, when we will base our discussions on The Lord's Prayer. We are considering splitting up into an Afternoon Group and an Evening Group, and there's no reason why one of these shouldn't use Facetime, or Skype, if a Group preferred that to using Zoom.

3 The Church Recipe Book, "Stir Crazy" will be on sale again after the service, price £7.50 each, or 2 for £14. Caroline will wait until the majority have left before moving towards the door with the books and in this way we will prevent a cluster forming around her. During the week, please contact Mary Bonner.

4 And finally, George's one-way system throughout the church is working very well. If anyone should want to see me after the service, please remain seated until the majority have left before alerting me – and then we will find a spot where we can speak safely.

Faithfulness has been our theme today, and we close the service with one of our greatest hymns..... Great is thy faithfulness....

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dTKIqmdfHSk>

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father,
there is no shadow of turning with thee
thou changest not, thy compassions they fail not
as thou hast been thou forever wilt be.

*Great is thy faithfulness! Great is thy faithfulness!
Morning by morning new mercies I see
all I have needed thy hand has provided –
great is thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me.*

Summer and winter, and seed-time and harvest,
sun, moon and stars in their courses above,
join with all nature in manifold witness
to thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside.

BLESSING

**God bless you with Love and Faithfulness
God bless you with Strength and Courage
and the Spirit's guiding
And the blessing of God Almighty
Father, Son and Holy Spirit
be with you
and all whom you love
now and evermore,
*Amen***