

LANGBANK CHURCH
Sunday 11 October 2020



Boaz at the Gate of Bethlehem

**He will cover you with his feathers,
and under his wings you will find refuge;
his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart.**

Let us pray

Loving God,
we pause from life's hectic pace
to remember who and where we are:

creatures of your making:
made to be at home in your presence
secure in your eternity,
strong in your Spirit.

Give us pause
from all our efforts,
from anger, pride, frustration
and any desire to prove ourselves....

And let us,
in the quietness,
simply be at home with you.

PAUSE

Then go with us
wherever life takes us:
master of all our thought and actions
and our eternal hope.
Guide us, always
and redeem us with your love,
and bring us home.

We say together now,
the prayer Jesus taught us
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 to god praise and glory

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SkVT8O5E1rMGuide>

Guide me, O thou great Redeemer,
pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak, but thou art mighty;
hold me with thy powerful hand:
bread of heaven, bread of heaven,
feed me now and evermore,
feed me now and evermore.

Open now the crystal fountain,
whence the healing stream doth flow;
let the fire and cloudy pillar
lead me all my journey through:
strong deliverer, strong deliverer,
be thou still my strength and shield;
be thou still my strength and shield.

When I tread the verge of Jordan,
bid my anxious fears subside;
death of death, and hell's destruction,
land me safe on Canaan's side:
songs of praises, songs of praises,
I will ever give to thee,
I will ever give to thee.

READING: Ruth Chapters 3 & 4 (abridged)

INTRODUCTION

Today, we finish the Book of Ruth,
by reading an abridged version of Chapters 3 and 4.

From Chapter 1 we remember Ruth's Faithfulness, as she leaves the land of Moab to accompany her mother-in-law, Naomi to her home town of Bethlehem. Both women have been widowed and they hope to seek protection among Naomi's family.

In Chapter 2 Ruth went out to the fields to glean for Barley, as was the custom for poor women – and there, she met Boaz, a relative of Naomi's and the richest landowner in the area. Boaz welcomed Ruth into his circle in a most generous way, and quietly ensured her protection.

..... *the story continues.....*

As the night of the Harvest Supper drew near, Naomi sniffed Romance in the air. Encouraging Ruth to look her best that evening.... she offered some advice:

“Wait till Boaz has had plenty to eat and drink, and when he goes to lie down – go and lie at his feet – that way he will know you are available for marriage.”

Ruth did as she was told – and when Boaz woke and found her there, he was delighted! But there was an obstacle in the way of their happiness.....

Boaz was a close relative, but there was one even closer - and he must have first chance to exercise his rights and responsibilities over Ruth.

Boaz went straight to the City Gate. And before long the ‘closer relative’ came along and sat down next to him. Then Boaz gathered ten of the town elders and said, “Sit down here with us; we’ve got some business to take care of.”

Boaz turned to his relative,

“The parcel of land that belonged to our relative Elimelech is being sold by his widow Naomi, who has just returned from the country of Moab. I thought you should know about it. You have the first redeemer rights, so you can buy it here and now, in the presence of these witnesses. But, if you don’t want it, tell me, so I’ll know where I stand, for by rights, I come after you.” He said, “I’ll buy it.”

Then Boaz added,

“You do realize, that when you buy the field from Naomi, you also get Ruth the Moabite, the widow of our dead relative. And, as her redeemer, you have the responsibility to have children with her, to carry on the family inheritance.”

Then the relative said, “Oh, I can’t do that—I’d jeopardize my own family’s inheritance. You go ahead and buy it.”

And he took off his sandal, as was the custom.

Then Boaz addressed the elders and all the people at the Gate of the City that day:

“You are witnesses today that I have bought from Naomi everything that belonged to Elimelech and his sons, including responsibility for Ruth. I will take her as my wife to maintain the dead man’s name on his inheritance. His memory and reputation will never disappear from his family or from this town. To all this you are witnesses this day.”

All the people said,

“Yes, we are witnesses. May God make this woman who is coming into your household like Rachel and Leah, the women who built the family of Israel. May God make you a pillar in Israel and bring honour to Bethlehem!”

So, Boaz married Ruth. She became his wife.

When they came together, the Lord made her conceive, and she bore a son.

Then the women said to Naomi,

“Blessed be the LORD who has given you kin this day!
May this baby grow to be famous in Israel!
May he make you young again!
May he take care of you in old age,
for your daughter-in-law who loves you,
who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him!”

Naomi took the baby and held him in her arms, nursing him. The neighbourhood women called him, “Naomi’s baby boy!” But his real name was Obed.

**Obed was the father of Jesse,
and Jesse the father of David,
who was the first King of Israel
and the ancestor of Jesus of Nazareth**

Amen



REFLECTION

Did it strike you as strange that the women of the town called Obed, "Naomi's baby boy"?

Why not, "Ruth's Baby Boy", or "Ruth and Boaz' Baby Boy"

The explanation lies in the kind of story that Ruth is.
It is a story of Redemption.

Each week I have condensed the narrative. If I hadn't, you might have noticed that the word 'Redeemer', or 'Redeemed' is mentioned 23 times.

You would also have noticed the full extent of Naomi's depressed state of mind, when in trying to persuade Ruth and Orpah to remain in Moab, she says,

"Go back, my dear daughters, why would you come with me? Do you suppose I still have sons in my womb who can become your future husbands? Go back – please! I'm too old to get a husband.

Why? Even if I said, 'there's still hope!' and this very night I got a man and had sons, can you imagine being satisfied to wait until they were grown? Would you wait that long to get married again? No, dear daughters; this is a bitter pill for me to swallow – more bitter for me than for you. God has dealt me a hard blow!"

Naomi has lost her husband and sons - her family – and, with it, her place in a society where a woman is identified only in reference to a father, husband or son. Without a man Naomi has nothing left to offer, and so considers herself 'nothing'.

Lack of self-esteem caused by loss of 'place' hasn't changed over the centuries. Bad things happen to good people – and the loss of a limb, of a partner, a home, or a career, instantly affects a person's landscape. And, when the loss is compounded it is easy to lose one's purpose in life. 'Nowhere' is a very bad place to be and Naomi's response to the old friends in Bethlehem show how lost she has become:

'Don't call me Naomi' she says – call me Bitter. For God has dealt me a bitter blow. I left here full of life and God has brought me back with nothing but the

clothes on my back. Why should you call me Naomi? God certainly doesn't. He ruined me."

And, at that, Naomi shuts her door until Boaz' apparent interest in Ruth offers her a ray of hope – one which gradually brings her back to life, reaching fulfilment in the birth of Obed. Her neighbours call him 'Naomi's baby' because they see their old friend restored to her former place. just as the picture shows..... **the matriarch at the heart of her family, nursing the next generation.** Naomi, has been restored to her rightful place. This is the meaning of Redemption.

- When someone's failing business is baled out – this is Redemption.
- When someone loses their job – then is offered another one, it is Redemption.
- When someone has fallen into bad ways – and then is helped out of their fear, obsession or addiction – this is Redemption.
- When someone who has been very ill recovers to full health – this is Redemption....
- But when someone who has been very ill, comes to terms with their illness and is no longer afraid – this also is Redemption.

Redemption means that God is working in the broken parts of your life, to restore you to to fullness of life – whatever that means for you. Bible Stories show us how God acts – often through the gracious acts of others - to restore people from a troubled place to life in all its fullness.

In any life, for restitution to take place, we need a redeemer..... step forward Boaz, redeemer kinsman. Throughout the Harvest season, Boaz takes Ruth under his wing, protects her, helps her, and provides for her household. He shows his love in all these ways, but he waits till she comes to him, before he acts to redeem her. (Does this sound familiar?)

Both he and Ruth know that, by law, another man has rights over Ruth..... and he is ready to pay the ransom price. Does this sound familiar? If not, perhaps the genealogy at the end of the Book will help..... Boaz, father of Obed, father of Jesse, father of David, and, according to Mathew and Luke, ancestor of Jesus of Nazareth.

In Boaz, we have, a model of our Redeemer, Jesus Christ. Jesus, who loved us so much that he paid the ransom for us at the price of his own life. He redeemed us, that we might live fully, and without fear. For Jesus it was a once and for all sacrifice – but for us, it is never-ending – that is the story of the New Testament.

And that leaves Ruth!.... neither victim nor redeemer, a role model for us all. Ruth is resilient in her misfortune, and an anchor in Naomi's life at a time when Naomi wants to give up.

Being an anchor to someone who is depressed is one of the hardest jobs of all. Ruth shows enormous inner strength as she patiently sets to the task of gathering food for the months ahead. She refuses to adopt the role of despised foreigner, or to mirror Naomi's hopelessness. She Keeps Calm and Carries On, and trusts her instinct.

At the Harvest Supper, Ruth takes ownership of Naomi's scheme. She is unambiguous in her actions and unafraid of asking for what she really wants. We have much to learn from Ruth. Meet your changed situation realistically but never lose hope. Be patient, and kind and trust in the Lord....

And that's what Ruth does. She, an outsider to Boaz' life and faith comes freely and confidently to her lord and lies at his feet.... asking, in the action, to be taken under his wing. putting her life in his hands, and trusting that he will redeem her. Trusting he will give her a place and a purpose by his side. This is how God wants us ALL to come to him – looking for fullness of life – and confident in his redeeming love for us.

Amen, thanks be to God

Although Summer is long gone, we close our Harvest Season with a hymn that is an old favourite for many of us.

One of these people is Rona Lawrie, who is due to come home from hospital later this week, and for whose recovery we are continuing to pray each week.

Its tune, of course, is 'Ruth' and its words catch the optimism God's love spreads, even in dark times.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eK0ToFWDr8M>

Summer suns are glowing
over land and sea,
happy light is flowing,
bountiful and free.
Everything rejoices
in the mellow rays,
all earth's thousand voices
swell the psalm of praise.

God's free mercy streameth
over all the world,
and his banner gleameth,
everywhere unfurled.
Broad and deep and glorious
as the heaven above,
shines in might victorious
his eternal love.

We will never doubt thee,
though thou veil thy light:
life is dark without thee;
death with thee is bright.
Light of Light! shine o'er us
on our pilgrim way,
go thou still before us
to the endless day.

PRAYERS OF INTERCESSION AND DEDICATION

Let us pray

'Lucky to be alive',
we tell ourselves
when disaster strikes
and others fall.

We pray today for those
for whom life is a struggle...
the bereaved,

especially those
who have lost many family members
through illness, accident, or conflict.
We pray for those for whom
circumstances cut deeply
and wound painfully, just now.....
for those who are already depressed
by the isolation that lockdown brings
and now dread the winter ahead;
for those who face the loss of businesses
they have spent a lifetime building
and for those who sit by the beds of loved ones
and pray for their recovery....

Loving God, guide them through the dark days
as a pillar of light...
and restore them in time to fullness of life
in a way that only you can do.

And let each of us become the compassion of Christ
to all those who need support.
Help us to weave your threads of consolation,
renewal and restoration into their pictures...
threads of your loving, healing purpose
interlacing their sorrow with your strength.

Bless the people of this parish
especially Stuart and Mia
as they prepare for their wedding on Friday
and give them great joy in their life ahead.

We pray for those who are vulnerable just now....
- Rona, that she may gain strength
from her homecoming
- and Margaret, as she recovers among us.

And there are others, known only to us
who need our prayers today.....
Lord, bless them and keep them,
as we bring them quietly to you now....

PAUSE

Lord, through the money we bring today
we dedicate ourselves to your service this week.
for the sake of those we know,
we will never meet.

We ask these things in Jesus' name,
knowing that wherever we are,
and however we feel,
you are with us
to heal, to guide, and to bless, *Amen*

INTIMATIONS

1) During the clearing out of the Church Garden last month, Elspeth rescued some Geranium Plants which had spread through the gravel. She took them home, potted them up and brought them along today. The pots are now sitting on the Church steps and if you would like a little bit of the Church in your garden next summer, please take as many as you wish and leave a donation for Church Funds.

2) The Fund raising Committee's Cookery book is also still for sale after the service, price £7.50 each, or £14 for 2. If you would like one, please wait till the end, and when Mary walks to the door, you can approach her one by one.

3) The Glasgow City Mission were delighted with the goodies that Graham took up to them after our Harvest Service. That day, they were hosting an International Event at which everyone was to be given food parcels, so our contributions were specially welcome. Thank you Graham for organising this on our behalf.

And thank you, Mary, for taking photos of last week's service. They are now on the Church website.

4) A request from Community Council regarding Hallowe'en.
"Because of restrictions at present it is proposed that, instead of visiting houses on Hallowe'en, the children take part in a scavenger hunt with their parents, searching for 10 Hallowe'en items placed throughout the village. To make it more exciting, it would be good if villagers placed a pumpkin picture in their windows for the children to spot on their way past.

Since it won't be possible to hand out treats on the night, it's proposed to hand out treat bags to the children at the end of the hunt. If anyone would like to donate sweets, they can be brought to church for the next two Sundays and left in a box near the entry door. Sweets need to be either packed, or individually wrapped. The treat bags will be made up and left for 72 hours to minimise risk.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MkTrFQLy6js>

Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided
urged and inspired us, cheered us on our way
sought us and saved us, pardoned and provided,
Lord of the years, we bring our thanks today.

Lord for that word, the Word of life which fires us,
speaks to our hearts and sets our souls ablaze,
teaches and trains, rebukes us and inspires us,
Lord of the word, receive your people's praise.

Lord, for the world; when we disown and doubt him
loveless in strength, and comfortless in pain;
hungry and helpless, lost indeed without him,
Lord of the world, we pray that Christ may reign.

Lord, for ourselves; in living power remake us,
self on the cross and Christ upon the throne;
past put behind us, for the future take us,
Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone.

BENEDICTION

Go in peace
assured of your redemption
through our Lord Jesus Christ
And the blessing of God Almighty
Father, Son and Holy Spirit
be with you and all whom you love
now and evermore, *Amen*