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Meeting ID 830 6391 9002 followed by #
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**21st June 2020 – Bible Month. Ruth 3 – The story of Ruth**

**Led by Greville Mills**

**Opening Prayers**

Loving God, as we gather together this morning we are not all together in one place, but in different places, some of us several miles apart… some alone… but we are together with one heart, one mind and one soul and we come to worship you; to bring our praises for your being with us, wherever we are and whatever our circumstances; providing for us; uniting us and caring for us. You sent your Son, Jesus to Redeem us; to save us when we stray from your way, and The Spirit to guide us, inspire us and empower us as live from day to day.

We have so much to be grateful for; your generosity in all things; the gifts and graces and talents you bestow on us; your kindness and most of all, your love for each and every one of us. Help us to reflect these qualities to each other and to those we meet who have not yet heard of you.

Be with us during these difficult days; keep us close to each other and to you, for we ask it in Jesus’ name. Amen.

**STF 6 “Father, we love you, we worship and adore you”**

1. Father, we love you, we worship and adore you:
glorify your name in all the earth.
Glorify your name, glorify your name,
glorify your name, in all the earth.
2. Jesus, we love you….
3. Spirit, we love you…

*Donna Adkins (b.1940) CCL167911*

**Reading: Ruth 3:1-18 (NIV)**

**Sermon**

“There is a Chinese curse which says, 'May he live in interesting times.' Like it or not we live in interesting times. They are times of danger and uncertainty; but they are also more open to the creative energy of men than any other time in history.”

So said Robert Kennedy in a speech in Cape Town in June 1966 (a few years after the Cuban missile crisis).

This phrase seems to crop up quite a bit whilst we’ve been in lock-down; have you noticed it? Although some think it came from China, a sort of ‘Confucius says’ statement, its origin is inconclusive. But, given our present circumstances, it seems to be very true.

Although there was no coronavirus or racial equality protests, you could say that the story of Ruth fell during ‘interesting times’, especially as we look more closely at the characters and the story during this year’s Bible week.

Ruth, the outsider was not born into the faith and felt no natural part of it – like many people today. But she came to find herself gathered into that story and given a quiet and obscure part that became critical to the way everything turned out in the story of God’s people.

There are not too many stories of women in the Bible, but think of Mary, Jesus’ mother – she was a seemingly insignificant person whose qualities lay in the fact that she was obedient and faithful to God, and God chose an important role for her.

What do we know about Ruth? She was a young widow; she was an alien in a foreign land, but in those days, in Judea, there were rules that provided protection for widows, orphans and aliens who find themselves on hard times. These laws were set out in Deuteronomy and Leviticus.

Ruth, on her own, and despite these traditions, would have been so vulnerable to all kinds of abuse and mistreatment, but Naomi and Ruth, together made a formidable partnership. Naomi had the trust that in her own country, she would find help for both her and her daughter-in-law, so she sought out her kinsman, Boaz, and, as we heard, set about approaching him to act as ‘redeemer’ – one to protect and provide for; to keep safe from harm.

Some of the terminology used to describe how, under Naomi’s guidance, Ruth sets out to attract the attention of Boaz, can only really be described as a form of ‘seduction’, depending on which translation is used. The NIV translation makes this quite clear that this is the intention (Ruth 3:3).

But we don’t really know what happened, so disguised is the language, but we do know that the plan eventually worked, and Boaz agreed to act as ‘Redeemer’ for Ruth.

But, for me, the story of Ruth, apart from being a story of faith and trust, is more a story of survival; a survival that due to the faith and trust Ruth put in Naomi’s God, became the story of an insignificant woman who played a significant role in the history of God’s people.

Women have always been subservient to men, and in many ways (sadly), this is still true today. I know it’s over 50 years ago, but just look at that quote from Robert Kennedy; he referred to the “creative energy of **men**” and yet there have been many examples where strong and courageous women have led their field in every sphere of life.

There have been so many examples of women fighting for their rights; the Suffragette movement for votes; bringing change in working conditions in coal mines and factories; CND and the women’s Peace Movement (Greenham Common). It was also the drive of the women in Northern Ireland who gave impetus leading to the Good Friday Agreement (Mo Mowlam’s role is largely forgotten).

Men have been stubborn to take action and it has always been the women who have taken the initiative; they’ve used their ‘influence’ (maybe using Ruth’s approach - and I use the term loosely) over men to push them into action – they were totally behind them, putting up with the difficulties of managing families, facing deprivation and coping with hardship during long strikes.

It was Winnie Mandela, working with the youth in the townships of South Africa who continued to fight for her husband’s release, and it was three women, Alicia Garza, Patrice Cullors and Opal Tometi, co-founders of the Black Lives Matter movement who have brought the attention of the world to the continuing racism that is endemic in post-colonial countries, including ours.

Tomorrow is designated ‘Windrush Day’, a time to remember the contribution made by the Afro-Caribbean people who came to this country to help us recover from the effects of WW2 nearly 72 years ago. There’s no doubt that the contribution made by the Windrush Generation, overcoming great sacrifice and hardship, did help us recover, but in addition, together with their descendants, have enriched us with their diverse culture which has come to represent the diversity of this nation, and many have gone on to lead the field across public life, in business, the arts and sport. Many of these have been women. The UK would be much diminished without their contribution, and yet over time they have been treated appallingly.

With years of neglect, and exposure of many injustices by successive governments; the introduction of the ‘hostile environment policy’ for one, has led to deepen the divide and create greater racism in the country. The present government have been shamed into accepting that things have not been just and have, at last decided to make changes… but we’re still waiting to see what they will be.

So, in terms of women’s rights, foreigner’s rights, asylum-seekers rights we have been way off the mark. Two generation ago, the UK was renowned as a place of refuge and help. This was based on our Judeo/Christian heritage, of how we used to treat people in need; but over time these compassionate responses have been forgotten; to our shame!

Ruth was a foreigner, a Moabite woman, with no power, but who played a big part in this story. Orpah was her brother-in-law’s wife who took a different road and disappeared from the story quite quickly, settling to return to her family… but no matter how seemingly insignificant these two women were, they were both part of the story of God’s people.

We are all small and insignificant people, no matter what our ego or self-esteem tell us, but we are all God’s children, as are all those who have a different colour skin, or a different faith, or a different culture, or whose sexuality is different… And we can be inspired by stories of people like Ruth, and together we can be a formidable force to bring about changes for good when we have God in our hearts; when we follow Jesus’ example of how to treat others, with acceptance, love and forgiveness; and when we’re open to being led by the Spirit in all we do. Amen.

**STF 256 “When I needed a neighbour, were you there?”**

1. When I needed a neighbour, were you there, were you there?
When I needed a neighbour, were you there?

*And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter, were you there?*

1. I was hungry and thirsty, were you there, were you there? …
2. I was cold, I was naked, were you there, were you there? …
3. When I needed a shelter, were you there, were you there? …
4. When I needed a healer, were you there, were you there? …
5. Wherever you travel I'll be there, I'll be there…

*And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter, I'll be there.*

*Sydney Carter (1915–2004) CCL167911*

**Prayers for others**

Heavenly Father, we pray for your kingdom to come into this unequal world; we pray for a Jubilee, where things can be put right. Help us to make this a place where we care about other people, our environment; with better use and sharing of resources; with equality for all people everywhere, no matter their race or faith or ethnicity or sexuality – for with you as our Heavenly Father, we are all brothers and sisters together.

We pray for survivors everywhere; help us to be kind and generous like those who helped Ruth, Naomi and Orpah; food for the hungry; shelter for the homeless and stateless; freedom for those enslaved; peace for those caught up in fighting and wars; justice for asylum-seekers, the displaced, the oppressed and persecuted.

We pray for the lonely… members of our churches who are not with us today… for any who are bereaved… those anxiously awaiting results of tests or treatments… any in care… for the frontline workers working to keep us safe…

Let’s have a moment of silence as we pray for people or situations known to us…

**The Lord’s Prayer**

**STF 338 “There is a Redeemer”**

1. There is a redeemer

Jesus God's own Son

Precious Lamb of God, Messiah,

Holy One.

*Thank you, O my Father,*

*For giving us your Son,*

*and leaving your spirit till*

*The work on earth is done.*

1. Jesus my redeemer,

Name above all names,

Precious Lamb of God, Messiah,

O for sinners slain

1. When I stand in Glory

I will see his face

There I’ll serve my King forever

In that holy Place

*vv1-2 Melody Green (b. 1946) v3 Keith Green (1953 – 1982) CCL167911*

**Blessing:**

To the hungry give bread, and for those who have bread give hunger to do justice… and let us go this week with God’s love in our hearts, to be generous in our actions, and always with the Spirit by our sides, to enable us to be Christ’s workers in the field. Amen.