



Highcliffe and Bransgore **Methodist Churches**

Sunday 11th October 2020, 10:30am, Ruth 1: 13b-22 "God in the grief"

Prepared by Rev'd Phillip Dixon

We come together to worship God with joy and hope that through the power of His Holy Spirit we can explore what it means to be known and loved by God. We all will experience the loss of loved ones, perhaps the loss of our dreams or homes or relationships. This series on the book of Ruth, which begins this week, has been especially selected at this particular time to reassure us that God is there with us even at the darkest times when we cannot feel His presences.



Today is also Homelessness Sunday and we remember that for many the loss of a home is often an indication of a much greater personal loss, perhaps a job, a relationship, a future.

Good morning church!

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst
for righteousness,
for they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted
because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:3-10 NIV(UK).

Song: StF 481 The Lord's my shepherd.

Sing/read /pray/proclaim.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CSlfUwmyFc&ab_channel=CollectiveWorship

The Lord's my Shepherd I'll not want
He makes me lie in pastures green
He leads me by the still still waters
His goodness restores my soul

*And I will trust in You alone
And I will trust in You alone
For Your endless mercy follows me
Your goodness will lead me home*

He guides my ways in righteousness
And He anoints my head with oil
And my cup it overflows with joy
I feast on His pure delights

Chorus

And though I walk the darkest path
I will not fear the evil one

For You are with me
And Your rod and staff
Are the comfort I need to know

*And I will trust in You alone
And I will trust in You alone
For Your endless mercy follows me
Your goodness will lead me home.*

Stuart Townend (b.1963)

Prayers of Thanksgiving and Confession.

Almighty Triune God – Father Son and Holy Spirit we come before you today with thankfulness and praise! We are conscious that we have received so many good gifts you have given us and we need to say thank you. We echo the words of Geraldine Latty's hymn (STF 68).

*'Worship God with the morning Sunrise,
Lift your voice in the evening rain. Bring
your thanks and praise, All your accolades
to him. Clap your hands to the God who
loves us. Sing your song to the one who
saves. Trust his promises, Know we are
his always!'*

We thank you Lord God, for friends and family for their care and love for us. For the joy of the birth of new family members and the happy memories of those that have passed from this earthly life. *'We clap our hands to the God who loves us.'*

We think of the power and magnificence of the sea, of walks by the seashore with waves gently breaking or crashing violently on rock or sand. We think of the beauty of flowers in gardens, fields and hedgerows and trees towering majestically above or swaying gently in the breeze. *'We clap our hands to the God who loves us.'*

We think of the many inventions which aid communication with others –

landlines, mobile phones, tablets, laptops and many more. We thank you God our Father for the skills of invention and science that you have given us and pray that we may use them wisely. *'We clap our hands to the God who loves us.'*

We thank you God for the Bible, for being able to read Your Word and to openly worship you. We ask that we may never misuse or squander this great gift and we ask your blessing on those persecuted for believing in you. *'We clap our hands to the God who loves us.'*

Father God, now and every day we thank you for the life, death and resurrection of your Son our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ that we may have life everlasting.

We clap our hands in humble and grateful thanks to you Lord God. **Amen**

Almighty God we come into your presence now. We come quietly and penitently. We come aware that we constantly fall short, in word and action, from being the people you would wish us to be.

We have criticised others for their actions rather than acknowledging and seeking your forgiveness for our own failings. Your Holy Word reminds us that we need to remove the planks from our own eyes rather than be critical of others.

In a time of quiet we individually confess our sins to you ... *(Pause)*

We know that often when we should have sought your guidance, we have not found the time to be truly still and quiet in your presence and listen to your will for us.

We know that when you tell us to keep no score of wrongs we go on keeping a mental list; we do not fully let go and forgive. Almighty, Redeeming God, we

come now to seek forgiveness for Jesus Christ your Son has died to set us free. Forgive our pasts and fill us with the Holy Spirit that we may live to serve you joyfully. Help us like your servant Ruth to put others before ourselves and strengthen and empower each one of us as we walk with and witness for you.

Amen. Thanksgiving and Confessional prayers contributed by Win George.

The Lord's Prayer. Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name, Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. Forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us. Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil. For the kingdom, the power, and the glory are Yours now and for ever. **Amen.**

Prayer before the reading and Sermon. Lord God as we come to hear your holy word read, and the sermon shared, we pray that our hearts and minds will be open to hear what you are saying to us today. **Amen**

Reading: Ruth 1: 13b – 22

‘No, my daughters. It is more bitter for me than for you, because the Lord’s hand has turned against me!’

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

‘Look,’ said Naomi, ‘your sister-in-law is going back to her people and her gods. Go back with her.’

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. 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.’ When Naomi realised that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her.

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?’

‘Don’t call me Naomi,’ she told them. ‘Call me Mara, because the Almighty has made my life very bitter. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty. Why call me Naomi? The Lord has afflicted me; the Almighty has brought misfortune upon me.’

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

A time to pause, read again, pray, and reflect.

Preaching notes:

The book of Ruth begins with the words “in the days when the judges ruled” signifying to those who know their Old Testament history a particular time in Israel’s history when “there was no king... and all people did what was right in their own eyes”. We hear of famine in the land and the family of Elimelech leave the promised land and live in the pagan land of Moab. So named after the son of Lot born through a deceitful and incestuous act.

Following the death of her husband and her two sons Naomi began the journey to

return to her homeland with her two daughters-in-law Ruth and Orpah.

These three women would have been very close, undoubtedly living, if not together, then certainly close by and depending on one another. Following the death of Chilion and Mahlon Naomi, Ruth and Orpah begin the journey to Bethlehem but at some point Naomi (see verse 8) tells the two women to go home to their original Moabite families. Orpah goes and Ruth stays. Of course, as with other Bible accounts, we only see the line of God's purpose with Ruth not with Orpah. Orpah loved Naomi but not enough to stay with her. Orpah kissed her mother in law (as she left) and Ruth clung to her. Bible commentator Matthew Henry compares Orpah's clear but limited loyalty and love for Naomi in the same way as some people follow Christ, a level-headed, sensible and outcome based "Christianity" that can fall away at the point where it becomes costly. Orpah went home, perhaps married a man of Moab and had children or perhaps remained single forever, we don't know. What we do know for certain is that her outcome was dramatically different from Ruth's whose faithfulness resulted in marrying Boaz and being in the line of the Messiah (see Matthew 1:5).

Consider the rich young man described in Matthew 19: 16-22 who walked away grieving from Jesus because discipleship looked too costly for him, perhaps like Orpah, God had more for him but he just could not commit fully and unconditionally, the things of the world were more important to him.

Tragic death can invoke in some a drawing closer to God as solace and comfort is

sought or can instead harden and sour an already partially uncommitted heart. That does not mean that any of us facing grief will not cry out in anger to God asking questions, bitterness, doubt, anger and self-pity will be amongst the emotions that will be experienced in the process of grief but it will pass.

In the midst of the grief and despair that Naomi experiences is her positive, courageous and wise decision to return home, both physically and no doubt spiritually, to Bethlehem and also in the midst of the grief she experiences the loyalty and firm commitment of her daughter-in-law Ruth.

As Ruth and Naomi arrive back in Bethlehem it is the beginning of the barley harvest, it is for us a picture of plenty and blessing in comparison to the famine when she left all those years ago. The system of the farmers not reaping to the very edges and allowing the poor to glean (an instruction originating from Leviticus 23) provided the poor with a self-help and dignified way of feeding themselves. They are poor but have returned, these two women (as a mother and daughter) are together and are prepared for what God may provide as emerging from the deep and overwhelming grief. Bitterness is passing and redemption is dawning.

Amen.

Song: StF 636: O love that will not let me go. Sing/read /pray/proclaim the words. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xJOUtCModPI&ab_channel=20schemesmusic

O Love, that wilt not let me go,
I rest my weary soul in Thee;
I give Thee back the life I owe,
That in Thine ocean depths its flow
May richer, fuller be.

O Light, that followest all my way,
I yield my flickering torch to Thee;
My heart restores its borrowed ray,
That in Thy sunshine's blaze its day
May brighter, fairer be.

O Joy, that seekest me through pain,
I cannot close my heart to Thee;
I trace the rainbow through the rain,
And feel the promise is not vain
That morn shall tearless be.

O Cross, that liftest up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from Thee;
I lay in dust life's glory dead,
And from the ground there blossoms red
Life that shall endless be.

George Matheson (1842-1906)

This well known poem describes the all-encompassing and overwhelming heaviness of grief. I hope it blesses you.

Poem: "Stop all the clocks"

Stop all the clocks, cut off the telephone,
Prevent the dog from barking with a juicy
bone,
Silence the pianos and with muffled drum
Bring out the coffin, let the mourners
come.
Let aeroplanes circle moaning overhead
Scribbling on the sky the message He Is
Dead,
Put crepe bows round the white necks of
the public doves,
Let the traffic policemen wear black
cotton gloves.
The stars are not wanted now: put out
every one;
Pack up the moon and dismantle the sun;
Pour away the ocean and sweep up the
wood;
For nothing now can ever come to any
good.

W H Auden

A prayer for the homeless

Lord God, hear our prayer for all women and men, boys and girls who do not have homes. For those sleeping in doorways and parks, in hostels and night shelters.

For families who were evicted because they couldn't pay their rent. For those who have no relatives or friends who can take them in. For those who are afraid and without hope. Jesus, help us to see your face in the eyes of every homeless person we meet. And guide us in what we should do to help them. **Amen**

Prayers of Intercession:

Heavenly Father we praise You because You encourage us to join together to intercede for the world You have created.

We pray for all world leaders as they make difficult decisions on how to control the effects of Covid-19. We pray for Donald Trump that he will recover fully from his illness, have Your will and purpose in his life and in the elections that will take place in the U.S. next month. Lord hear us – **Lord graciously hear us.**

We pray for those who live in areas where the cases of Covid-19 are growing. We pray for the hospitals as admissions are rising and more patients need intensive care nursing. Protect those who care for the sick in very difficult situations and be with the families of the sick if they are unable to see their loved ones. Lord hear us – **Lord graciously hear us.**

We pray for colleges and universities as young people start their new courses, give the Principals and Tutors wisdom and guidance as they seek to keep the young people safe, through regular virus testing

and blended learning we pray for the young people to have a strong sense of responsibility to themselves and other people.

Lord hear us – **Lord graciously hear us.**

We pray for all those who continue to struggle financially especially as the Governments furlough scheme comes to an end and Lord give our leaders and business owners the wisdom in how to continue to support people. We ask that You would bless the work of our local foodbanks, we pray for marriages that have come under pressure at these difficult times to be restored and for good communication and relating.

Lord hear us – **Lord graciously hear us.**

We pray for our church fellowships, for our minister Phil, for the Bransgore Church Council this week and for the continuing discussion at Highcliffe on our way forward. We pray for kind and wise conferring; may Your will and purpose be made known and be done.

Lord hear us – **Lord graciously hear us.**

For those facing operations, recovery following an operation or ongoing illness we pray for Your presence with them. We pray for those living in fear and uncertainty about the future, give Your peace and courage Lord to those who most need it today. For the family of Margaret Macdonald, a faithful and dedicated servant of the church in Bransgore, bless them in their time of mourning.

Lord hear us – **Lord graciously hear us.**

We pray that as we go into a new week You would guide and direct us by the [power of Your Holy Spirit. We ask these prayers in the name of Jesus Christ our Saviour. **Amen.** Jenny Hutchins

Song: StF 627 Mighty to save (Everyone needs compassion) Sing/read or proclaim the words.

Everyone needs compassion,
Love that's never failing,
Let mercy fall on me.
Everyone needs forgiveness,
The kindness of a Saviour,
The hope of nations.
Saviour, He can move the mountains.
My God is mighty to save,
He is mighty to save.
Forever, Author of salvation,
He rose and conquered the grave,
Jesus conquered the grave.
So take me as You find me,
All my fears and failures,
Fill my life again.

I give my life to follow
Everything I believe in.
Now I surrender.

Saviour...

Shine your light and let the whole world see.

We're singing for the glory of the risen King.

Shine your light and let the whole world see.

We're singing for the glory of the risen King.

Saviour...

Reuben Morgan and Ben Fielding

Blessing: May the God of hope fill you with joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may abound in the power of the Holy Spirit. **Amen**

Ruth: Uncovering Hidden Treasures by Mo Tizzard provides some excellent depth to this much overlooked book. Also please see <https://churchhomelesstrust.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Church-Materials-2018.pdf> for some very helpful resources concerning homelessness.

Phillip Dixon, October 2020. YouTube links are external resources and are provided to help you engage with the songs. Singing the Faith and Hymns and Psalms resources are provided under license: CCLI 178182