

TOGETHER

only physically apart

Elston | North Muskham | Southwell | Sutton on Trent

Fundamentals not Practicalities.

Reflections on post-lockdown church.

Much has been made in the last few weeks about when we should open our churches and what church should be like on our 'return'. Indeed the news seems to mention churches regularly with the latest being talk of opening churches for private prayer. Personally I'm thrilled that we are moving towards that point. (I've missed being in God's house dearly and continue to miss all of you.) That said, it's worth being clear about what a 'return' involves.

Firstly, whilst the government have the power to lock our doors, our church never closed and isn't closed. Also, they do not have the power to *unlock* our doors, those decisions are ours. The Methodist connexion is releasing guidance regularly as to what is wise and safe (the latest statement being that they do not envisage any changes until after conference (meaning the beginning of July). Of course guidance seems to change daily so this may already be out of date when you read this! But, the power to unlock the doors and in the ways in which we return to our premises lies with us. Decisions to reopen will be made by church councils (or those with powers delegated to them by Church Councils) and this will not be possible without the support of a wider group of volunteers. It will be these 'trustees' that will be responsible for mitigating risks and deciding the nature of our return. (Some may decide that opening the doors is too much too soon.) There's a lesson to be learnt following the decision to open schools - which has proved not to be as straightforward as some first thought! It's worth also mentioning (where worship is concerned) that it is the circuit's responsibility to facilitate the presence of local preachers and there will certainly not be full availability any time soon (many of our local preachers will still be shielding when some churches do reopen). Finally, it is the decision of every individual as to whether they are able to attend church and this is an entirely individual decision based on individual circumstances and I would advise everyone to follow their own specific advice. That said, whilst we need to be sensible and good stewards of what God has placed into our hands, we need not be afraid. If God is for us, who can be against us! We should not be afraid that the church will cease to be if we don't open quickly, or be afraid of the virus when we do re-open - we just need wisdom.

My thoughts, however, are increasingly drawn not to practicalities but to the fundamentals. I've read (and am continuing to read) a variety of articles about church post-lockdown. One particular article in the [Irish Times](#) asked, "Can we not seize this opportunity for some profound reflection on how we relate to God in significant ways...and nurture these so that when we reassemble on Sundays our celebrations will be richer and more profound."

I invite you then to join the conversation. What is fundamental to church? What should our priorities be in shaping the event worship experience? How can our gatherings bring us closer to God and each other? Please pray. Please talk. Please listen to what God is saying to you. Please imagine what church could become. Most of all, screw your courage to the sticking point and trust that God is with us and ask God's Holy Spirit to lead and guide us all. As Canon J. John pointed out, when we leave an aeroplane we are reminded to take all of our personal belongings with us and asked to check before we rush to leave the plane. As we leave lockdown, we should not be in too much of a rush to exit that we leave behind all we have learned during this time. We simply cannot return to how church was.



1. Circuit Services

A variety of worship opportunities will be hosted on the 'Newark and Southwell Methodist Circuit' YouTube Channel (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCF-CBiFzWL81CUJrKjC1Psw>) and details will also be on the 'NewarkandSouthwellMethodist' FaceBook Page (which can be accessed without a FaceBook account - [Click Here](#)). Tune in today!

2. TV Services

Sunday Worship BBC 1 (also ONLINE)

10:45am. Youth minister Sarah Bradley leads a service from Holy Trinity Platt Church in Manchester. This service was filmed before the closure of all church buildings.

3. Radio Services

BBC Radio 4 (Also online.)

Cardinal Vincent Nichols celebrates Mass for the Feast of Corpus Christi live from Westminster Cathedral

4. Zoom Coffee Time!

Our Zoom Coffee Time 'gathering' is now becoming a weekly thing and is becoming quite a circuit gathering with folk from different churches meeting each other for the first time in some cases! I'm really excited that after participating in a wide variety of services we can all converge together! Therefore we'd like to invite you (regardless of which service you've tuned into - or even if you haven't!) to join us for coffee on Zoom. You'll need to provide your own tea/coffee and biscuits but the Zoom code is: 829-2931-4783 and the password is ?????. For more details on how to connect ver Zoom, please get in touch!

If all this this baffles you - call me or email: peter.hibberts@methodist.org.uk.

B is for Boaz!

Ruth chapter 2 (NRSV) (For background and chapter 1 see TOGETHER 12)

Enter Boaz. I wonder how Hollywood would portray Boaz? We love a hero but unfortunately, all too often, it's a handsome, strong man swooping in to rescue the damsel in distress. I want to avoid focussing too much on that trope because I think the actions of Naomi and particularly Ruth here are pretty heroic. We left Naomi returning somewhat destitute on her return from Moab to Bethlehem just in time for the Barley harvest. The locals are surprised to see her back but they clearly do not help her as what follows is a desperate struggle to find food. It is enshrined in Jewish (and Israelite before it) culture that the widow should be looked after but perhaps owing to their departure to Moab and circumstances that we can't fully know, she is neglected. Without Ruth, she may even have died in poverty (a story that is sadly not unknown in modern society). But this chapter has more Bs than just Boaz. This week B is also for **Breaking, Blessing and Belonging**.

We know that in chapter 2 Ruth is sent to 'glean'. This practice was the legal right of the poor and involved following the harvesters in the field collecting the missed remnants of the harvest (sometimes in the nooks and crannies of the fields that weren't worth bothering with in the main harvest). This was kind of the equivalent of universal credit but it's worth pointing out that it was unreliable (maybe another parallel with our welfare system) and even a dangerous practice. There was no protection for Ruth and she was at risk of attack and even molestation from the male workers. She was a foreigner with no Male relative and so had no rights beside gleaning. Make no mistake, gleaning was a mark of desperation and shows Naomi and Ruth's **Brokenness**. It's worth hitting the pause button here and reflecting on the brokenness of our society. There are many in poverty with few rights and little protection who are, right now, extremely vulnerable. This at a time when with modern methods (even during the pandemic) there should be enough world harvest for all. The vulnerable are, like Ruth, forced to live from the scraps that we discard or overlook. We don't always acknowledge the story behind these fellow human beings or give them the dignity of being able to earn their own living. Instead they are often trafficked, blocked and exploited. We must pray and reform society because this is evidence that our world (much like the time of the Judges - when this is set) is a world where people 'did what was right in their own eyes' (Judges 21:25 NRSV) and not God's.

But this is not the end of the story for there is **Blessing!** Boaz first notices Ruth. It's a puzzle as to how Boaz, a relative of Naomi's hasn't stepped in to help her as it seems by his words in chapter 2 that he is well respected and possibly Godly, but he does notice Ruth and asks after her. Boaz offers Ruth a triple blessing. He counts her among his women (a strange phrase for us) which basically means she's off limits to other men who may have attacked or even raped her; he gives her water drawn by the men; and he instructs the worker not to 'rebuke' - a further protection that confirms the danger she was in (as if we need

any extra evidence she is told by Boaz and Naomi not to go to any other fields - as they would be dangerous). There are many stories of homeless folk and refugees being abused; the most vulnerable in our society need our help and protection. Unfortunately, for the servants of Boaz, Ruth is simply a Moabite - from Moab (the unnecessary repetition in the description the servants offer Boaz in verse 6 perhaps shows the view of the servants that she is foreign and therefore insignificant) but to Boaz she is a person, with a story that he asks to hear. For Boaz Moabite Lives Matter. I'm minded of those who find their way into our culture as refugees and asylum seekers and feel challenged that to us they can be regarded as foreign, sometimes wrongly seen as a threat and often dehumanised (who can forget 'them' being referred to as 'swarms' in the awful Brexit debates). Furthermore we are seeing folk treating their own countryman as foreign purely because of the colour of their skin! (We cannot and should not avoid the dehumanisation of a police officer - sworn to protect - asphyxiating a man as he cried, I can't breathe). Do we take time to consider 'other's' stories? Do we value them enough? Do we offer them protection when they need it? Do we notice their humanity? It doesn't begin with a payment, charity - it begins with the re-humanising act of asking their story. I challenge you to ask for and listen to someone's story this week - you'll be surprised where it takes you.

Actually, we know where it takes Ruth. It takes her into a place of **belonging**. It is in this act of hearing the story and the practical support that comes out of it that the restoration of Naomi begins. The Hebrew word 'kin' in verse 20 is 'go'el' meaning nearest or next-of-kin but you may see in the footnotes of your Bible the phrase 'right to redeem'. The kinsman redeemer is a concept that we'll explore further in chapter 4 but in essence it comes into play when a male landowner dies and his property is at risk of loss (the women at this time could not take ownership). The nearest male relative (kinsman) could marry the widow, provide a male heir and redeem the land. Here the widow is protected from abuse, the land (and therefore livelihood of the widow) is rescued and the family name of the deceased continues as the heir is considered the child of the dead man. It's easy to look back and ask why they didn't just let the woman own the land (as we would now) but there is some wonderful symbolism that God uses to speak to us through a culture that isn't necessarily God's design. The important thing about kinsman redeeming is that the responsibility falls on the redeemer but the inheritance never comes to them (in fact they lose an heir!) Let's just wonder if this could be seen a beautiful foreshadowing of God's redemption of us on the cross. We've lost our connection with God through the mistakes we've made, yet God sacrifices his own son to redeem us, give us a hope and a future and bring us back to belonging with him. Take a moment to thank God for his kinsman redemptions of you and next week we'll explore how it unfolds for Ruth and Naomi!

Prayer Space

This week, led by Ruth chapter 2, it feels right to pray for the marginalised.

Pray for refugees at this time who seek safety, somewhere to belong. Pray for protection from those who would exploit and abuse. Pray for those who bring aid and fight for the rights of the refugee.

Pray for those marginalised in their own society because of race, colour or creed. Pray for those who feel that their lives simply do not matter. For God to protect them. For our attitudes to change. For justice and reform for unjust structures.

Pray for those isolated and alone in our communities as a result of the pandemic. Pray for those in poverty in our own country and abroad that help will find its way through.

Pray for God, through us, to bring to all who are **broken, blessing and belonging**.

If you have specific prayer requests, do get in touch. If you would like requests to be shared around the SMC prayer chain contact Colin Beckett colin1244@gmail.com.

There is also a specific page, dedicated to prayers written for this time on the Methodist Church website: <https://www.methodist.org.uk/about-us/coronavirus/prayers-during-the-coronavirus-pandemic/> If you are lost for words to pray, you may find these helpful.

30 DAYS WITH RUTH

Bible Mentals

Sundays:
7th, 14th, 21st and 28th
10:00am onwards
Newark & Southwell Methodist
Circuit YouTube Channel

Zoom Home Groups:
Tuesdays: 9th, 16th, 23rd and 20th
2:00pm and 8:00pm
All Welcome.
For Zoom login details
contact Rev Hibberts

Trinity Sunday reflective songs...

You're calling us (StF 37) [LINK](#)

Blessed assurance (This is my story) (StF 548) [LINK](#)

Faithful God (StF 47) [LINK](#)

Lord I come before your throne (StF 58) [LINK](#)

As the deer pants for the water (StF 544) [LINK](#)

Click 'LINK's to access YouTube clips of each song.

Help for the isolated

Elston residents, if you need support during the lockdown please contact the Good Neighbourhood Group through Sandra Wright on 07773 689736 or Linda Fitzgerald on 0798937115.

The Sutton-on-Trent Buddies Corona Virus Helpline is up and running - for help of any kind the number to ring is 01636 351615. or email suttonbuddy@outlook.com

Southwell Town Council can provide support by calling 07874780931, 07874780932 or 01636816103.

North Muskham's Buddy Scheme can be reached by contacting Andy Willey on 07967138724 or muskhambuddyscheme@yahoo.com.

If you would like to volunteer you should also make contact using the above details.

Can you help?



As Ruth chapter 2 leads us to consider the vulnerable position of refugees, may I direct you to a local charity supporting refugees.

They need our support all the time but the needs are especially great at present. Why not investigate the stories of refugees on their website (nottsrefugeeforum.org.uk)? Take time to hear the story of refugee and consider how you could contribute.



During the pandemic, if you have time on your hands, why not investigate the work of

Hope For Justice. (hopeforjustice.org) Have a look at their Freedom wall and read the stories of the many folks whose lives have been transformed by HfJ. They 'exist to bring an end to modern slavery by preventing exploitation, rescuing victims, restoring lives and reforming society.' and at present are finding it very difficult to keep their 11 'lighthouses' open. They offer a safe and caring place where children can stay before reintegrated to family-based care or independent living, where appropriate. Perhaps you could donate to their work.

10-6-20

Families:

families4SMC@gmail.com

CHILDREN'S CHURCH AT HOME!

During social distancing we are providing full children's church session for our younger church family members each week. You will be able to download the plan every week here:

<https://www.southwellmethodist.org.uk/childrenschurchathome.htm> so that you can do it at home as a family to help your children explore the theme that Rev. Peter preaches on in his service.

These activities may require some resources but they should be things you can gather up from your homes. There is also a PDF of activity sheets which children can complete during the service. All you'll need for this is a pen/pencil/colouring pens and to print off the sheets before the service starts. Enjoy!

The story of Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz is a beautiful story of love and redemption. The love between Ruth and Naomi sets a wonderful example of committed love that goes the distance. The willingness of Boaz to be the kinsman redeemer for Ruth illustrates the redemptive love Jesus has for us as well. This week's children's church activities will help children learn about this story of love and commitment.



Don't forget... you can watch a lovely animation of the story here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=irThVpdeSXXk>

Keep in Touch

There will be lots of opportunities to keep in touch during this time, not least by picking up the phone, to each other, or giving me a call (Rev Peter: 01636812166) or sending an email (peter.hibberts@methodist.org.uk). Can I recommend the Newark and Southwell Methodist Church FaceBook page to you in particular. It's an open page so it's available to all and you needn't be on FaceBook to view it. You can access it at facebook.com/NewarkandSouthwellMethodist/. Don't worry if you're not a member of Southwell Methodist Church, we're all in this together!

Also, spread the word to anyone you think would appreciate receiving this newsletter. Let them know of our FaceBook pages and if you come across someone who might benefit from receiving it please get in touch.