

TOGETHER

only physically apart

Elston | North Muskham | Southwell | Sutton on Trent



Reflections on post-lockdown church 3. Creating a contagious church.

We continue on our lockdown journey (week 15) though, as I write this, we have just received the news that lockdown is to be eased further and quite significantly! As one in the shielding category, I was happy to hear the news that the 1st of August will, at present, be a significant target for being able to *stop* shielding. Also amongst this many public places have opened and talk of church worship resuming has been mentioned again. Of course, as someone pointed out, opening up is not as quick or easy as closing down.

This week Methodist Conference also gathers (online) and has many important topics to discuss and decisions to make. One important report that will be received and voted upon this year is the report **'God for All.'** This report aims to present a strategy for Evangelism and Growth in the Methodist Church. Our Calling says of evangelism: "The Church exists to make more followers of Jesus Christ." I wonder what we can imagine of the church post-lockdown in relation to the way that we reach out and 'make more followers of Christ.'

One comment I heard recently about churches that reopened was that 'churches which are ineffective and shrinking shouldn't hurry to return to how they were.' Last week I challenged folk to pray for the church and I would like to echo that challenge but I would also like to challenge us to consider how the church needs to be different in order to share our faith and see growth. I'm not interested in growth so that we can boast higher numbers, but if we truly believe that Christ died for all then church needs to be reaching out to all and if our numbers are shrinking then how effective can we really pretend we are at reaching out?

One of the fellowships that's been happening during lockdown a couple of weeks ago reflected on what the church's 'R number' is. The 'R number' in Covid terms is the 'Reproduction Number' - in other words the number of people that will be infected by each person that contracts Covid-19. (R₂ suggests that everyone who contracts Covid will infect 2 further people who will in turn infect 2 people and so on.) If the R number is above 1 then the virus is growing in new infections exponentially and is out of control. If it is below 1 then it is shrinking, there are fewer cases day by day and eventually the virus will die out (or at least be under control). So if we consider the church's R number as the number of disciples that will be 'made' by every disciple, if each disciple makes 1 disciple (leads 1 person to faith in Christ) our numbers will be static, if each disciple leads 2 to Christ, our churches would, before long, be full to overflowing. It saddens me to say that during my four years as a minister, I have presided over more funerals for those who were beloved members of our church families than I have membership services. If I were to report our R number, I think it would be below 1. That's great news for Covid, but it's disastrous for the church.

The challenge is there. As we are locked down, let us reflect on how we cannot return to church as it was, well - not for long. We must reimagine a church for all where we all become more infected and infectious in our faith.

"The Church exists to make more followers of Jesus Christ."



Worship Opportunities

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)

Details of this Sunday's BBC service are currently unavailable but schedule information and the last four Sundays services can still be found online - [CLICK HERE](#).

3. Radio Services

BBC Radio 4 (Also online.)

The Revd Lucy Winkett, Rector of St James's Church, Piccadilly, and composer Bob Chilcott explore the power of art to speak into troubled times.

4. Zoom Coffee Time!

Our Zoom Coffee Time 'gathering' is now a weekly thing and is quite a circuit gathering with folk from various 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 we'll provide the welcome. Zoom details are given in our services or available on request.

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

N is for Naomi!

Ruth chapter 4 (NRSV) (For background and chapters 1-3 see TOGETHER 12-14)

This week we complete the journey - going from hunger to harvest, from once upon-a-time to happily-ever-after and what a journey! I wish all refugee journeys ended in happily ever after.

This week N is not just for Naomi but also **Needing, Nurturing and Naming**. In the final chapter Ruth and Boaz meet in daylight. Boaz quickly convenes the men needed to witness the transactions and manages to persuade the nearest relative to relinquish his right to Naomi's land. Boaz then becomes the kinsman redeemer for both the land and Naomi. Of course, with all that is the marriage of Ruth which Boaz seems keen for despite it not being his responsibility - he could have simply redeemed the land!

The kinsman redeemer process has been a difficult one to grasp (for me at least!) but in essence it involves land being bought back by the nearest relative to prevent it being lost forever from the wider family. Naomi's land is clearly out of reach for her (otherwise why would Ruth be sent to glean?). Perhaps it had gone to ruin in their 10 year absence or even been taken over by others, who have perhaps got some kind of squatters' rights - either way she is locked out by law and circumstance, without a redeemer. The key to Ruth being involved here is that the only way the land can progress from generation to generation is with a male heir (which neither Naomi nor Ruth have and therefore Elimelech's name and property risk being lost forever). With Ruth's eventual marriage to Boaz, Ruth bears a son - Obed. To see how important this is, just look at the reaction of the women of the town - they suggest that, to Naomi, that Ruth is more to her than seven sons (seven being the perfect number and therefore having seven sons was a sign of the ultimate blessing from God).

Naomi (and Ruth's) **needs** are both simple and complex. Their first need is for food and security, but as the story develops what they need is to fully belong - to have their place in society restored. For each refugee that makes a perilous journey the primary needs are for shelter, security and food. But my experience (2nd hand) of folk working with refugees shows that there are still deeper needs - a need for self worth for example. I love to see where projects provide things as simple as a haircut for refugees or a chance to play football with each other. We are not robots or wild animals, whose needs are simply mechanical, for survival. We are people. Boaz could have stopped at protecting and feeding Naomi and Ruth, Naomi could have been content with those needs being met, but she and Ruth dare to seek more. I wonder how we respond to refugees, as a society, when folk want more than just handouts to satisfy physical needs. What if refugees want a place in our society, friendship, a livelihood (many refugees are highly skilled people with professions and a drive to contribute to society). What if they want a chance for themselves and their descendants to be British?

In this chapter Boaz goes beyond protecting and feeding and into **nurturing**. Boaz marries Ruth. Actually he has to overcome her foreignness (legally) to marry her. Many immigrants to our country have great hurdles to 'integrate' changing their names to western names, taking on western pursuits. It's a shame we place these hurdles in belonging - we ask them in some ways to stop being them. We call it 'integration' and prize it as being British but surely the best of British is the best of all the cultures that make our culture. We too need to nurture all of society from the powerful to the vulnerable - it's not just about foodbanks or benefits and housing, it's about love.

We began with **names** for Naomi, back in chapter 1 and we conclude with names. It first goes back to Elimelech, his family name will continue, Obed (meaning servant) is born and there is a beautiful point where the baby is placed in Naomi's bosom - Obed is declared as hers and therefore Elimelech's heir. But let's not miss what happens also to Ruth, her promise of being with Naomi no matter what is completed, she is no longer a Moabite but is described as 'young woman' and then 'daughter-in-law'. Ruth now belongs and we have our happily ever after; she is even named in the genealogy of King David and therefore Jesus! (Matthew 1:5)

I want to conclude the story by revisiting the kinsman redeemer and considering what this might be saying to us, today. Did you notice why the first relative declined the opportunity to be the redeemer? It would have damaged his inheritance. In redemption an heir is not created for the redeemer but for the otherwise lost (the deceased, Elimelech). If Boaz had been struck by disaster and lost his heir, Boaz's name could have been lost and his possessions reverted to Elimelech's line. The redeemer's lot is not one of gain but of sacrifice. This rescue of a lost line, is at the potential sacrifice of the redeemer's own line. It's hard not to see Christ in this. Our own line is in jeopardy as our sin cuts us off from God. In the words of the hymn, 'I once was lost' but by amazing grace we are found. Christ empties himself of all but love, and surrenders to death on the cross. On the cross his sonship of God is lost in the statement, 'My God, My God, why have you forsaken me.' At that point Jesus too feels lost. Yet by paying this price we are each redeemed - into the family of God and our story will not end at death but now has a happily *for-ever* after. Take some time out to pray and thank God for your redemption.

I don't know what needs lockdown and Covid-19 have brought and I pray you will have all of your physical needs for security, protection and vitality met. But amidst this I also pray for our deeper needs: for the isolated to know that they are not cut-off or forgotten, for those whose employment or livelihood is lost, to know that they still have a future. For the rebuilding of society where we all belong and know that the need for nurturing and love should eventually supersede physical needs. I also pray for a world where ethnicity is no longer a barrier and national boundaries are softened. Naomi and then Ruth are able to travel and find refuge twice (albeit with great difficulty) and eventually Ruth finds belonging. Would she be able to do that

Prayer Space

I invite you to continue to pray for the reimagined church and for how we can shape a church for all.

Rev. Helen Cameron (Northampton District Chair) wrote this prayer that you may find helpful in this:

God of all grace, we rejoice that your love is for all, unlimited and free.

May we, your children, have the same generous love for the world that you show us in Christ. For in Christ, we are all seen and known fully, redeemed and restored, and we need never be ashamed of failure.

May we, in responding to all you offer us in Christ, learn to view others and see your world only through the lens of your love, which holds us, heals us and restores us to fullness of life.

Amen.

The Methodist Church, nationally, has also set up a prayer and news line...



FREE phone lines for prayers and news from the Methodist Church

Listen to a **prayer**: 0808 281 2514

Listen to **news**: 0808 281 2478

Content is updated weekly on Thursday afternoon

*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.*

For more prayers visit the [Methodist Church Website prayers for the Pandemic Page](#).

30 DAYS WITH RUTH

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

Reflective songs...

As we gather in your presence now (StF 609) [LINK](#)

Empty, broken, here I stand (StF #) [LINK](#)

There is a redeemer (StF 338) [LINK](#)

Guide me O thou great redeemer (StF 465) [LINK](#)

The UK Blessing (online only) [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.

Dial-a-sermon service now live!

Dial a Sermon

To listen to this week's sermon from Revd. Peter Hibberts please call this number. (Calls cost the same as a local call.)

01636 558871

Newark and Southwell Methodist Circuit
helping you stay connected whilst we're apart.



Thanks to the work of David Watson and Steve Fowles, we now have a telephone sermon service. If you have no access to the internet but would like to hear the reading and sermon for the previous Sunday, you can dial up the number above and hear it from the minister's voice! Calls cost the same as a local call and recordings should be around 15 minutes each - you can access them at any time of the day or night!

Do get in touch if you need to on (01636) 812166 or peter.hibberts@methodist.org.uk.

24-6-20

Families:

families4SMC@gmail.com

CHILDREN'S CHURCH AT HOME!

We are providing a 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.



Good News/Bad News

Play the Good News/Bad News game with your family. The first player says "the good news is" The second player says "but the bad news is" Repeat going round everyone (you may all get several turns) until either inspiration runs out or everyone is bored! For example, 'the good news is the sun is shining...' 'but the bad news is we'll all have to apply suncream...' 'the good news is we can go for a walk in the sunshine...' 'but the bad news is I've got hay fever.' etc.

Explain that we are still looking at the book of Ruth in the Bible where there is much bad stuff for one family – famine, death, poverty, tears but the good news is there is love, loyalty, a marriage, a baby and a very famous descendant to look forward to. Maybe you could share with your children a time when you've been through a difficult time. Maybe you're finding this period of lockdown difficult but can still see good news in it.

The amazing thing is that God can turn these circumstances around in ways which would never be expected if we trust in Him. The book of Ruth is about one young woman whose love and devotion to her mother-in-law meant that she refused to leave her and even adopted her mother-in-law's religion, putting her faith in God.

Try playing the Good news/Bad news game with Ruth & Naomi's story:

Bad news – 'boo' – There was a terrible famine.

Good news – 'hooray' – A mother named Naomi managed to escape to a place called Moab with her husband and two sons

Bad news – 'boo' – Naomi's husband died in Moab.

Good news – 'hooray' – Naomi's sons married two women called Ruth and Orpah.

Bad news – 'boo' – Both of Naomi's sons, Ruth's and Orpah's husbands, died in Moab.

Good news – 'hooray' – Ruth promises to stay with Naomi so she won't be alone.

Bad news – 'boo' – The other widow Orpah leaves Naomi and Ruth.

Good news – 'hooray' – Naomi and Ruth returned to Israel.

Bad news – 'boo' – They are very poor in Israel and have very little food.

Good news – 'hooray' – A kind man called Boaz lets Ruth gather grain from his farm.

Good news – 'hooray' – Ruth and Boaz eventually marry and have a son; Naomi becomes a Granny!

A great reminder that God is able to turn bad situations around!

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.