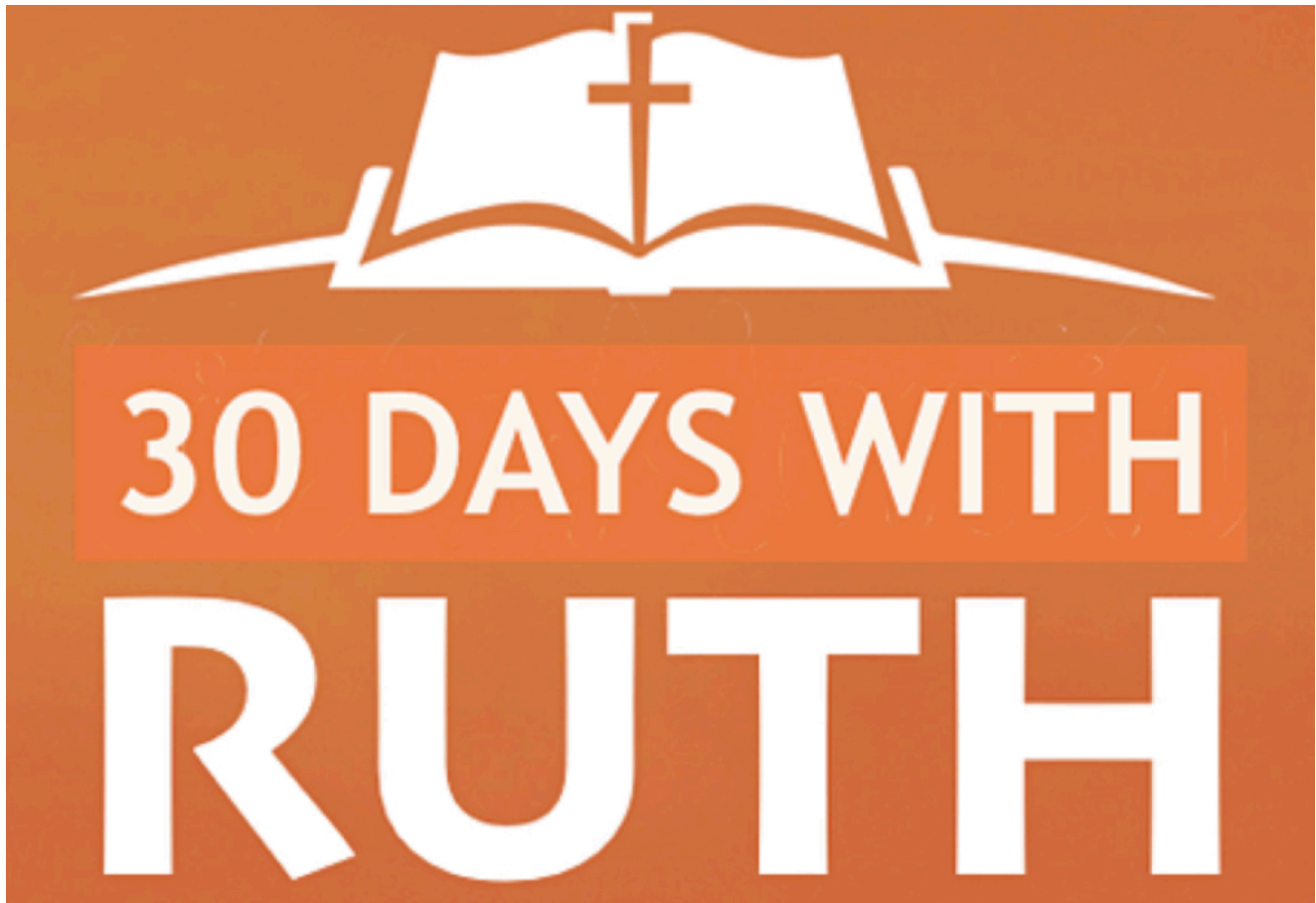


TOGETHER

only physically apart

Elston | North Muskham | Southwell | Sutton on Trent



It's Bible Month and this year the focus is Ruth. Nestled between Judges (the time when it is chronologically set) and Samuel (who Jewish tradition suggests is its author - though some scholars believe it to have been written after Samuel's time) Ruth is often overlooked. It is, "...a story about finding home and hope. Often read as a romantic comedy which begins more or less with, 'once upon a time' and ends with, more or less, 'happily ever after.'" (Dr Rachel Starr writing in this year's Bible Month notes.)

Throughout June we will be unpacking Ruth in the TOGETHER newsletter, Sunday services and (starting next week - 9th June) Bible Study Groups hosted on 'Zoom' (internet based meeting software). Each week we take one of the four chapters and 'Zoom' in on the different characters and themes from this Hebrew 'novella'. Week one is Orpah, week two is Boaz, week three is Ruth herself and finally, in week four, we focus on Naomi. You could spend this week reading Ruth in its entirety (you might find you can't put it down!) or serialise as we will and just read chapter one this week. I suggest you at least read chapter one before going any further with this a newsletter, I don't want to spoil it for you!

To set the scene, the book is named after one of its main characters, a young woman of Moab, the great-grandmother of King David and an ancestress of Jesus (Matthew 1:1-5). The only other Biblical book bearing the name of a woman is Esther. The setting is a time in Israel's history characterised by religious and moral degeneracy. Israel and Moab are at peace but the Moabites are not regarded well as they are considered to descended from Lot's sordid affair (Genesis 11-14 and 19). Without further ado, let's start at the very beginning, a very good place to start - **head to chapter Ruth chapter One!**



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

Trinity Sunday Worship BBC 1

10:45am. The Reverend Canon Leigh Richardson, sub-dean and precentor, leads a service for Trinity Sunday from St Davids Cathedral in Pembrokeshire. With hymns sung by the Songs of Praise congregation in July 2019, the programme was filmed before the closure of all church buildings was announced.

3. Radio Services

BBC Radio 4 (Also [online](#).)

Jonathan Rea and Susan McKay reflect on how the Trinity gives us hope in situations that often seem impossibly difficult..

4. Zoom Coffee Time!

Following a wonderful Zoom Coffee Time 'gathering' *after* last week's combined circuit service for Pentecost concluded we'd like to invite you (regardless of which service you've tuned into) to join us for coffee on Zoom. You'll need to provide your own tea/coffee and biscuits but the Zoom code is:???? and the password ?????. 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.

What's in a name?

Ruth chapter 1 (NRSV)

Do you know what your name means? Mine, Peter, means 'rock'. I have to say, I don't feel like much of a rock at present. Currently 'shielded' (deemed 'clinically vulnerable') I'm hardly out. I'm not delivering meals, having socially distant pastoral visits or chaplain at a hospital comforting the sick and the dying. Perhaps I should change my name from 'rock' to 'cheese'. (I have also felt like I'm melting in the latest heat-wave!)

In the conclusion of this chapter Naomi, on her return to Bethlehem, tells everyone to stop calling her Naomi and start calling her Mara. Naomi, in Hebrew means 'pleasant' and Mara means 'bitter'. What a journey! What would make someone want to rename themselves in that way? Well she leaves Bethlehem, possibly as a political asylum seeker, but with a husband and two sons (certainly a good family situation for an Israelite). However, her husband soon passes away and after marrying foreigners, so do her two sons. This leaves her in the worst of predicaments, a widow with two widows! She has no one to support her, is in a foreign land and there has been a famine - triple whammy! On returning to Bethlehem (possibly humiliated) feeling bitter is to be understood; but there are other themes in this chapter that we can learn from...

There is here a theme of **return**. It's not entirely clear why Elimelech and his family go to Moab (other than famine). It's possible, as I've already eluded to, that they were political asylum seekers. (Elimelech means 'My God is King' and they are in a time of the rule of Judges; and it's a poor rule - we're told at the end of Judges that it's a time when 'there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right *in their own eyes*.)' Whatever the case, in chapter one there are nine mentions of 'return', 'turn back' or 'go back'. Their leaving of Israel appears to have been forced but the real story begins with their *return*.

Our leaving of our buildings has also been forced. I wonder what God is teaching us, as we lock our physical doors, about what it means to be church. As we journey in the foreign land of 'virtual' or 'lockdown' church, what will God teach us? He may seem unnervingly silent at times, but know that God is never idle and is at the very least waiting in the wings if not pulling many unseen strings.

As we are without our 'normal' worship, I'm mindful of the words of the Matt Redman song, 'When the Music Fades', otherwise known as 'Heart of Worship.' Actually the story behind the song might have something to offer us at this point in our church's journey. In the late 1990's, Redman's home church in Watford was going through a spiritually tough time. In the words of Redman, "there was a

dynamic missing.” So the pastor did a pretty brave thing: he asked his congregation what they were bringing to God in worship, or if they were just there as consumers, soaking up the music. His point was that the band and church had lost their way in worship, and the only solution was to strip out every diversion and distraction; and that included the entire sound system and the worship band. ‘Unplugging’ initially led to an embarrassing silence but eventually the congregation rediscovered their own voices and encountered God in a fresh way. By the time they felt sufficiently ready to reintroduce the musicians and sound system, the church had found a new perspective on worship: that it’s all about Jesus, and that it demands a response from the heart.

There is also, in chapter one of Ruth, the theme of **tears**. There must have been much weeping for Naomi. First in the loss of her husband, then the loss of each of her sons and finally, we’re told, as Orpah leaves her. Orpah is a quickly forgotten character who has just a fourteen verse presence. That said she is loving, caring and even obedient in her return. Her name means cloud. We could see that as a negative thing and Orpah sometimes gets a bad press (she’s the deserter) but in a time of famine, or more specifically drought, a cloud is the first sign of salvation. Orpah’s time was done but she did journey some way with Naomi and Ruth and though it’s Ruth that takes centre stage, her part is important. I wonder what, in this journey, we leave behind. What must we lose, what must we weep over but part with as the church leaves its chrysalis?

Finally there is the theme of **bread**. The chapter begins with famine and ends with harvest - with a glimmer of hope. It ends with the following sentence, “*They came to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.*”

Bethlehem is known in Hebrew as ‘the house of bread’. We may leave Naomi, at this point, destitute (albeit with Ruth as companion). But know that the story hasn’t finished. It is time for harvest and if we go back to verse six we see that this is the reason for her return: “*she had heard in the country of Moab that the LORD (which here is Yahweh - the great I am) had had consideration for his people and given them food.*” God may be strangely silent in the book of Ruth, too, but when we do see God move perhaps we can realise that God was there all along, waiting in the wings, more present than first thought, and ushering in a harvest.

If you are finding this crisis really tough right now, know that God is not absent (I’m sorry, I can’t explain God’s delay any more than I can at this stage in Naomi’s story) but I believe that God is already working for good and a harvest is coming - a time of safety again, of security and where we can return home.

Prayer Space

Please pray, this week, for the church. As lockdown restrictions are gradually eased, we will be considering how we return to church gatherings. This will be particularly difficult. We’ve seen that reopening schools was not as simple as turning back on a light and it will be similarly difficult with churches. When the time eventually comes we will not be able to re-open all of our churches as once and many of our members will be too vulnerable to return immediately (*pray for the vulnerable*). The buildings will need to be adapted to mitigate risk and worship as we knew it will not be possible initially. (*Pray for wisdom for all those responsible*.)

Furthermore, we, as the church, need to hopefully re-imagine what God is leading church to look like and have courage to allow God to re-form us, indeed trans-form us. (*Pray for God’s Holy Spirit to guide us as we seek God’s will*.)

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

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...

Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty (StF 11) [LINK](#)

The splendour of the king (StF 15) [LINK](#)

Father, we love you (StF 6) [LINK](#)

When the music fades (StF) [LINK](#)

Be thou my vision (StF 545) [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?

Video contributions: Could you contribute to our YouTube channel? The staff team are keen involve folk in the online church experience and would love to hear from you if you have something to say. This could be a testimony, a short homily (a thought for the day style contribution based on a Bible passage or circumstance) a prayer or a poem/reflection. If you can record something and send it to me, then I will try to include it somehow (it may be featured in Sunday worship or added to the YouTube channel as a 'stand alone' item.) For more information, do get in touch.

Giving:



Could you make a donation to the Newark FoodBank via your local collection point? Or perhaps you could make a financial donation online at: newark.foodbank.org.uk.

Having been unable to do the usual, 'physical' envelope collection during Christian Aid week, could you donate to the Christian Aid Week collection at justgiving.com/campaign/CAWeek2020?



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!



RUTH'S STORY...

As we start our journey into the book of Ruth, you may like to watch this short animated version of the story with your family:

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

At the beginning of the book of Ruth, Naomi changed her name. Do you know what your name means? If not, look it up in a baby name book or online. Does the meaning of your name actually represent who you are? Names in the bible were very significant. What is the significance of Naomi's change of name?

Craft/Prayer Activity

Ruth showed great loyalty to Naomi and stayed with her, even when she had the chance to go home to her own family. Try making your own 'sticking together' craft like this one. Draw round your hand twice and then cut it out and interlock the fingers. You can add detail like sleeves and a heart if you like too. (You could even use your hand and the hand of someone you stick with in your household!)



Who are the people that stick by you when things get tough? Thank God for them and ask God to bless them today.

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.