

St Columba's Church - Virtual Service - 18 October 2020

Welcome

Welcome wherever you are reading this. You will have memories of past Harvest Festivals and you may well have been one of the children taking part. This year is different. Reading this at home will not feel the same. Please take solace in knowing that the Lord of the Harvest is not different. God is still with you today as he was in years past.

Hymn: We plough the fields and scatter (<https://youtu.be/ZWHMZsf-Ano>)

Prayer (Prayers come from Church of Scotland: Weekly Worship)

In the fading of the summer sun,
the shortening of days, cooling breeze,
swallows' flight and moonlight rays
WE SEE THE CREATOR'S HAND
In the browning of leaves once green,
morning mists, autumn chill,
fruit that falls, frost's first kiss
WE SEE THE CREATOR'S HAND

Creator God, forgive our moments of ingratitude,
the spiritual blindness that prevents us
from appreciating the wonder that is this world,
the endless cycle of nature,
of life and death and rebirth.
Forgive us for taking without giving
reaping without sowing.
Open our eyes to see
our lips to praise
our hands to share
May our feet tread lightly on the path we tread
and our footsteps be worthy of following
for they lead to you.

As a part of nature's wondrous cycle
Of new birth, growth, fruitfulness and death
We rejoice in the creation of new life,
For parenthood, the passing on of knowledge,
For understanding and the wisdom of years.
We are grateful for those who have gone before
Passing on to us our spiritual heritage.
May our lives blossom as the apple tree in Spring
May we become fruitful in thought and deed
And may the seed of love that falls to the ground
Linger beyond our time on this earth.

And hear us now as we pray:
Our Father, who art in heaven,
hallowed be thy name;
thy kingdom come;
thy will be done;
on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our debts,
as we forgive our debtors.
And lead us not into temptation;
but deliver us from evil.
For thine is the kingdom,
the power, and the glory
for ever and ever.
Amen.

Bible readings

Ruth 2: 1-12

Ruth Meets Boaz in the Grain Field

2 Now Naomi had a relative on her husband's side, a man of standing from the clan of Elimelek, whose name was Boaz.

2 And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, "Let me go to the fields and pick up the leftover grain behind anyone in whose eyes I find favor." Naomi said to her, "Go ahead, my daughter." **3** So she went out, entered a field and began to glean behind the harvesters. As it turned out, she was working in a field belonging to Boaz, who was from the clan of Elimelek. **4** Just then Boaz arrived from Bethlehem and greeted the harvesters, "The Lord be with you!" "The Lord bless you!" they answered. **5** Boaz asked the overseer of his harvesters, "Who does that young woman belong to?" **6** The overseer replied, "She is the Moabite who came back from Moab with Naomi. **7** She said, 'Please let me glean and gather among the sheaves behind the harvesters.' She came into the field and has remained here from morning till now, except for a short rest in the shelter." **8** So Boaz said to Ruth, "My daughter, listen to me. Don't go and glean in another field and don't go away from here. Stay here with the women who work for me. **9** Watch the field where the men are harvesting, and follow along after the women. I have told the men not to lay a hand on you. And whenever you are thirsty, go and get a drink from the water jars the men have filled." **10** At this, she bowed down with her face to the ground. She asked him, "Why have I found such favor in your eyes that you notice me—a foreigner?" **11** Boaz replied, "I've been told all about what you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband—how you left your father and mother and your homeland and came to live with a people you did not know before. **12** May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge."

John 6: 24-35

24 Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus.

Jesus the Bread of Life

25 When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?" **26** Jesus answered, "Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.

27 Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. For on him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."

28 Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?"

29 Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent."

30 So they asked him, "What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do? **31** Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.' [c]"

32 Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. **33** For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."

34 "Sir," they said, "always give us this bread."

35 Then Jesus declared, "I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.

Hymn: I am the Bread of Life (<https://youtu.be/ZuxJ8bcHTbQ>)

Reflection

The book of Ruth, as you may remember from earlier in the year when we were looking at one Old Testament book a week, is a wonderful film-script like story. It's about friendship, about family and romance. And the backdrop is harvest. The driving force behind the story is the harvest and the good God does when people share.

As you may recall, a lady called Naomi and her husband lived in a small farming town called Bethlehem. Bethlehem means "house of Bread" and was a name given to places where a lot of wheat was grown. However, a famine swept through that farming community and Naomi and her husband became immigrants and settled in a place called Moab, a place that would not seem to welcome immigrants like them.

However, they settle but soon tragedies strike. Naomi loses her husband. Her two sons marry two locals, But then these two sons pass away as well. Leaving Naomi and her two daughters-in-law.

Things get worse as famine now comes to Moab, And Ruth hears rumours that back in long-departed Bethlehem and so she decides to back home. However, Naomi urges her two daughters-in-law to remain in Moab. Stay here, this is your home, you'll make a better life for yourself here rather than worrying about this old lady. Go, May God grant you the same kindness that you two have shown me and our family.

And her two daughters in law that she is so proud of, Are loyal. No, we will stay to look after you. And Naomi persists and her daughter in law Orpah agrees to go.

And you as well, Ruth, go home, You don't need to stay with me any longer. Don't ask me to leave you, to turn back from you Naomi, Ruth says, For wherever you go, I will go, wherever you will lodge I will lodge. Your people are my people, and your god is my god, for only death will part you and me".

And you guess that Naomi is delighted that her much loved daughter in law is going to stay with her. But you wonder Ruth's reaction, Lost everything that is familiar and now she is arriving in a little farming village as a hated foreigner in a strange land.

And what a stir when they arrive in that village, Oh my goodness, they say, is that not Naomi, What has happened to her?

Oh, don't call me Naomi anymore she says, that means sweetness, Call me Mara, that means bitterness, That's more appropriate after the harm God has done to me, I left this village full of hope, And now I return empty.

And things were hectic in that farming town. All hands to deck. It was harvest time.

Ruth and Naomi have nothing to harvest, But this town still observes the old Jewish law not to meticulously harvest all the wheat. If you miss anything leave it for the poor and the immigrants. So, Ruth she suggests to go out and try and get themselves something to eat that way.

And Naomi says, I still have a distant relation here, a distant cousin here. Maybe if you explain who you are he'll let you pick the scraps in his fields.

And that's what happens. The great bringing in of the harvest. The happiness of a job well done.

And far behind the harvesters are a group of immigrants and poor, Gleaning what they can from what is left over, And Ruth is one of them.

And Naomi's distant cousin now enters the picture, He's called Boaz and he's a no-nonsense farmer full of kindness, May the Lord be with you, he greets his workers, May the Lord bless you, they say back to him.

And as Boaz looks over the scene of the harvest taking place, The dust, The work, He looks down the field and says: Who is that woman? One of the lads says: That's the foreign lady that came back with Naomi. She asked me this morning if she could harvest the scraps, I said yes and I tell you, She has been out here working non-stop ever since.

And Boaz walks down to see Ruth, this foreigner, and says to her: Look you can harvest here as long as you like, There are also pitchers of water over there as well. You help yourself.

And here is Ruth, been through so much, Arrived in this strange place, Struggling, People talking about her, And now this one person has gone out of their way to be kind, And what a difference it makes to Ruth.

And Boaz says, I've heard why you did after your husband died. All you did for your mother in law, coming here to a foreign place. And Boaz says to her, Also have some of this lunch as well, And when you come back tomorrow, You don't need to just take the leftovers, But come and harvest from the sheaves as well.

And when Ruth gets back that evening, And Naomi rushes to ask her how the day when, Ruth must have been over self to tell of how unbelievably the day went. But first Naomi, look, and she empties out to Naomi the doggy bag she has brought back from lunch. Oh bless God, Naomi says, He hasn't left me!

And now Ruth goes out everyday harvesting until the harvest is finished, And she goes home as Boaz and others have a party to celebrate the end of the party.

Naomi tells her daughter in law Ruth, About another custom they have. That a relation can marry a widow and restore or redeem her fortune. Boaz is your kinsman, says Naomi.

And Ruth goes out at the end of the party and at night meets Boaz, And says to him that if he would be willing to marry her then her mother-in-law Naomi would not be in poverty.

And Boaz says, I thought you were extraordinarily kind with how you treated Naomi by coming back here with here, But this is beyond that. You love Naomi so much that an extraordinary women like you would be willing to marry someone like me.

Of course I would be willing to marry you, Boaz says, But look, I happen to know that you have an even closer relation in town. It is right that this person knows about you first and if they choose to marry you, And he would be doing very well to do so. Boaz adds, If he marries you then that is right, But if he says no, then I will marry you.

But first, look pass over your shawl, and Boaz. The farmer, of course, fills it to the brim with barley.

And again Ruth goes home. Shares what's happening, And they wait. I think everyone wants the same thing but will it happen? The next day is the big day. Boaz will go to sort all this out. And so what is going to happen?

And Boaz goes to the town square the next square, A slow start perhaps after the night before, People now back in town rather than out at the harvest. In this small town Boaz

guesses correctly that this kinsman will pass by and he does. Sit here, Boaz says to him, and he does. It just seems like everyone likes and respects Boaz. And Boaz also gathers a quorum of elders to serve as a witness to the legal act that will take place.

And Boaz tells this relation that after the passing of her husband and sons, Naomi inherited some land but she had to sell it on her destitution. Now says Boaz, you are the nearest relative and you can buy this land and redeem the estate. And the relation assumes that this offer is too good to be true. Buy back land in the name of a widow who has no children and therefore no heirs. He's assuming essentially this is land he will be able to keep. Ok, says the man, I'll redeem the estate.

And Boaz, now reveals that it's a bit more complicated than that, There is a daughters-in-law. A foreigner, Boaz points out. Heart no doubt pounding and hoping this additional information will make him change his mind.

Well, the man says, I can't marry a foreigner. That will spoil my estate. You'll need to do it, Boaz.

And after all this, Ruth and Boaz are married, And they have a baby son. And in the final scene of the book of Ruth As the people of the village celebrate the end of this story, Naomi has lost her husband and sons, in great poverty she had tried to do the right thing by Ruth by telling her to go But Ruth had stayed. And Boaz who tried to do the right thing by Ruth putting someone else in front of him Is now with this family.

But that's not the last mention of Ruth and Boaz in the Bible.

If you look at the very first page of the New Testament, Matthew Chapter 1, Then you will see the family tree of Jesus, And there you will see the name of Ruth. The great grandmother of King David.

You see this Harvest Festival is right there, baked into the story of Jesus. So let's also use our harvest like Ruth did, And let God work through our trust and generosity. Amen.

Hymn: For the beauty of the earth (<https://youtu.be/xlBkpAm3fhw>)

Prayer for Others

Heavenly Father,
This is your garden, Creator God,
A thing of beauty
Beyond understanding ,
A poem that is being written,
Not in words,
But in colours,
Wind's whisper,
Soaring bird,

Snowdrop's petal,
Gentle rain,
Sunlight's warmth.
This is your garden, Creator God,
A thing of beauty
Beyond understanding.

We pray for your world,
We pray for the environment,
We pray for the world's farmers and producers,
We pray for people in places of struggle,
We pray for all of us affected by the Coronavirus,
And we pray for those closest to us.
(A moment of quiet).
God of the Harvest,
Hear our prayers.
Amen.

Hymn: O Breath of Life (https://youtu.be/5QHZB_v0ZaY)

Blessing

May the road rise up to meet you. May the wind be always at your back. May the sun shine warm upon your face; the rains fall soft upon your fields and until we meet again, may God hold you in the palm of His hand. Amen.