

# PARISH OF KIRKLEES VALLEY – WEEKLY SHEET

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Epiphany Year B – 24<sup>th</sup> of January 2021

***It ain't what you do, it's the way that you do it...***

Dear friends

Welcome to your **weekly service sheet for home** for **this the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Epiphany, the 24<sup>th</sup> of January**, with music from Barry and Anne!

Today we continue our journey through the Book of *Ruth*, and after considering **promises** and **God's provision** over the last two weeks, we come to a dramatic encounter in a barn at night, as we consider what it means to do the right thing and **act in the proper way** in a tricky situation for everyone involved. Don't forget **Derek Akker's reflection on this Chapter** on our *A Church Near You* website, which I encourage you to take a look at – <https://www.achurchnearyou.com/church/16034/>

This service has been prepared as we continue to **watch, pray and wait for the full roll-out of the vaccine**, but mindful that there will **still be some considerable time** before any kind of wider community immunity is reached. Please continue to **keep yourselves safe**, and thank you to **those who have been in touch** to say they will be **worshipping from home for the foreseeable future**. As far as we are allowed, each church will be **open for worship on Sundays at 9am for All Saints, and 11am for St James** – but **please, please book in**, as if we have no one booked in, we will **not** be holding a service, so we **don't advise** turning up if you haven't booked in.

We continue to follow the latest Covid-secure protocols, and our risk assessments are available on our *A Church Near You* pages. Please remember, even if you **have been** fortunate enough to be vaccinated, **not everyone has** – and there is still the **possibility of transmitting the virus** to others **even if** you are vaccinated.

**Please be mindful** of the Chief Medical Officer's advice that **we should act** at all times **as if we have** the virus and **anyone** we come into contact with **may** have it.

We continue to **offer fellowship, support & care** in any way we can – do **please get in touch** if you would **like a chat, have questions** or **for any other reason**. We are **nearly through** January now, and so if we can hold onto hope, and keep encouraging each other, it **won't be long** before the **green shoots of Spring** will be here!

**Thank you** as always for your support, encouragement and prayers.

**Every Blessing**      **Simon** 07745 232662 [simondjcook@aol.com](mailto:simondjcook@aol.com)

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# **A SERVICE OF PRAYER & PRAISE FOR SUNDAY**

**+In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, Amen.**

The Lord be with you. **And also with you.**

## **Hymn – Dear Lord and Father of Mankind**

*John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892)*

Dear Lord and Father of Mankind, forgive our foolish ways!  
Reclothe us in our rightful mind, in purer lives thy service find,  
in deeper reverence praise, in deeper reverence praise.

Drop thy still dews of quietness, till all our strivings cease;  
Take from our souls the strain and stress, and let our ordered lives confess  
the beauty of thy peace, the beauty of thy peace.

Breathe through the heats of our desire thy coolness and thy balm;  
Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire; speak through the earthquake, wind & fire,  
O still small voice of calm! O still small voice of calm!

## **Time of Confession**

**Lord God almighty, in our sinfulness we cry to you to take our guilt away,  
and to cleanse our lips to speak your word, through Jesus our Lord. Amen.**

*May the Father of all mercies cleanse us of our sins, and restore us in his image  
to the praise & glory of his name, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen*

## **A Prayer for the Day**

God of all mercy, your Son proclaimed good news to the poor, release to the  
captives, and freedom to the oppressed: anoint us with your Holy Spirit  
and set all your people free to praise you in Christ our Lord. **Amen**

## **Reading: Ruth, Chapter 3**

**3** One day Ruth's mother-in-law Naomi said to her, "My daughter, I must find a home for you, where you will be well provided for. **2** Now Boaz, with whose women you have worked, is a relative of ours. Tonight he will be winnowing barley on the threshing floor. **3** Wash, put on perfume, and get dressed in your best clothes. Then go down to the threshing floor, but don't let him know you are there until he has finished eating and drinking. **4** When he lies down, note the place where he is lying. Then go and uncover his feet and lie down. He will tell you what to do."

<sup>5</sup> “I will do whatever you say,” Ruth answered. <sup>6</sup> So she went down to the threshing floor and did everything her mother-in-law told her to do.

<sup>7</sup> When Boaz had finished eating and drinking and was in good spirits, he went over to lie down at the far end of the grain pile. Ruth approached quietly, uncovered his feet and lay down. <sup>8</sup> In the middle of the night something startled the man; he turned — and there was a woman lying at his feet!

<sup>9</sup> “Who are you?” he asked.

“I am your servant Ruth,” she said. “Spread the corner of your garment over me, since you are a guardian-redeemer of our family.”

<sup>10</sup> “The LORD bless you, my daughter,” he replied. “This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor. <sup>11</sup> And now, my daughter, don’t be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All the people of my town know that you are a woman of noble character. <sup>12</sup> Although it is true that I am a guardian-redeemer of our family, there is another who is more closely related than I. <sup>13</sup> Stay here for the night, and in the morning if he wants to do his duty as your guardian-redeemer, good; let him redeem you. But if he is not willing, as surely as the LORD lives I will do it. Lie here until morning.”

<sup>14</sup> So she lay at his feet until morning, but got up before anyone could be recognized; and he said, “No one must know that a woman came to the threshing floor.”

<sup>15</sup> He also said, “Bring me the shawl you are wearing and hold it out.” When she did so, he poured into it six measures of barley and placed the bundle on her. Then he went back to town.

<sup>16</sup> When Ruth came to her mother-in-law, Naomi asked, “How did it go, my daughter?”

Then she told her everything Boaz had done for her <sup>17</sup> and added, “He gave me these six measures of barley, saying, ‘Don’t go back to your mother-in-law empty-handed.’”

<sup>18</sup> Then Naomi said, “Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today.”

*This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.*

## -Reflection from Simon – The proper way...

Sometimes there's a **right way** to do things, **the proper way** – and a **wrong one too...** There are **rules to follow**, even if they are **unwritten customs**. Like footballers throwing the ball back to the other team if they kick it out of play because a player is injured. Or tennis players putting up a hand to acknowledge a random bounce to their advantage off the net. Or the essential rule of single life I've gleaned from too many bad TV shows, that the worst thing you can do on a first date is talk about your ex the whole time... Or like a president going to his successor's inauguration...

Chapter 3 of Ruth is a **finely balanced tightrope walk** between comedy, farce and something much more serious. What's at stake is **Ruth's future**, as Naomi **tells her** right at the beginning – but what **Naomi is also doing** is **using every bit of her understanding** of the rules of Jewish law and tradition to **navigate Ruth through** what *could* turn into a really dodgy situation **in a proper way!**

As I've said before, I consider Ruth to be the **first-ever sitcom** – and Chapter 3 **shows the form** at its best. You can almost **hear the studio pitch**: *'When Gentile widow Ruth and her Jewish mother-in-law Naomi arrive back in Bethlehem, it's not long before hunky Boaz crosses Ruth's path. But how's a new girl in town going to get her man? It'll take all of Naomi's dating know-how to help Ruth bag the boy of her dreams. Starting Fall 2021 on NBC. 9pm Eastern Time, 8pm Central, 6pm Pacific.'*

Right from the beginning of the chapter, **Naomi** is the one **driving things forward** rather than Ruth. But to our ears, what she **asks Ruth** to do is **less than proper**, and **a little problematic** to say the least. As my father would say in his best broad Scots, *'Doll yersel' up, hen, it's time we get ye a fella.'*

It's a measure of **how far Ruth trusts Naomi** that she gets **all dressed up, washed & perfumed**, and is willing to **go at night** to the threshing barn, **hide**, and then pretty much **literally throw herself** at Boaz's feet! And when our translations say *'feet'* – well, that's **not quite** what the Hebrew means!

What comes next conjures up **an extraordinary mental image** of Boaz suddenly waking up and thinking, *hang on, I'm a bit chilly downstairs*, and **jolting awake** when he sees this glammed-up young woman lying at his, ahem, feet...

For a Bible story this is both **racy and risky**, and at first glance it's certainly **not proper!** Ruth is giving Boaz the power to **ruin or redeem her future and her reputation** by this one act. But there is gentle humour here too. Naomi **knows** Boaz as her kinsman – **knows** his godly reputation, and crucially **knows** the **legal and moral role** he has towards her and Ruth as a **kinsman-redeemer**, a family member with the duty of taking care of them. She **knows** he won't take advantage of her daughter-in-law...

Far from being improper, Naomi has been very careful to make sure Ruth does everything **precisely in the proper way**. Naomi has even primed Ruth with the **right words to say** to invoke Boaz's duty to her – & Ruth does exactly as she has been told.

Just as in chapter one, where we first hear **Ruth's promise** to Naomi and to God, so here we see her again **staying faithful to Naomi** and to what she has asked her to do. And because she **trusts** Naomi completely, just as in chapter two, **God provides** for Ruth by **keeping her from harm**, by **prompting Boaz** to know exactly what the **proper response** is, and **by Boaz sending her away** with six measures of barley and an implied promise that **he'll be calling on her** very soon!

This is **not** about Ruth's choice of evening wear and perfume – but it **is because she's worth it**. Worth it because of **her trust, her faithfulness, and her honouring of Naomi** in everything she has done. Worth it because she has done everything **in the proper way!**

This is **what draws Boaz to her** – **not** her outward appearance or her *reet good mek-up*, but the **quality of her character**. Because of **who she is**. And in the end, that's the **real basis** for a **loving & healthy relationship**, and a **blessed & strong marriage...**

What **we can learn** from this chapter is **how God works through our character** – through the way **we navigate our way** through life, from the **choices we make to our response** when we find ourselves in situations and circumstances a long way **out of our comfort zone**. Unlike the first time they meet, **Boaz is completely out of his depth** here – with this attractive woman coming to him at night. Whereas out in the fields **he was the landowner**, instructing his labourers to take care of this gleaning widow – now, **he is alone and vulnerable**. It's **not just** Ruth's reputation on the line!

Ruth has **more control than Boaz** this time around – but **only** because **she is faithfully following Naomi's guidance**. In many ways she is **equally out of her depth** – putting herself into a **risky situation** with a man she doesn't really know from Adam... It's **only Naomi** back at home, reflecting with pleasure on her matchmaking efforts, who **can see how things are going to turn out...** *Wait, my daughter, until you find out what happens. For the man will not rest until the matter is settled today.*

This chapter is all about **how God works through our character** – especially in times and situations where **we are uncertain**, where we **find ourselves** dealing with the **unexpected**, the **difficult** and maybe the **downright embarrassing**. What it reminds us, is that **God gives us the means** to negotiate these situations **if we hold onto our values** – if we look to **act in a proper way**.

That **doesn't mean** being strictly rule-based – it means **holding onto** the rituals and customs **which matter to us**, which are **part of who we are**, in **how we treat other people** and **why** we treat them that way. It's about the **promises we have made as Christians** bearing **fruit** in the **way we behave** and **live our lives**. Because we **only live properly with God** when we **stand by and live by** the values we proclaim.

So Ruth **shows in her actions** the **faith and trust** at the heart of **who she is**. Boaz shows **his integrity and faith** in responding appropriately to Ruth and behaving honourably in a situation where many men would take advantage. And Naomi shows that **she has re-embraced her faith** as a child of Israel – **her trust** in the provision of God through the Law and the Covenant. She **knows** what Boaz will do next **because she trusts God** to work through him & through the keeping of the Law.

**For us today**, this matters because we are living in a **world of rules & restrictions on our freedom** tighter than many of us have ever lived with before, because of the Pandemic. The story of Ruth & Boaz reminds us that **in such a time**, and **whatever strange situations we may find ourselves in**, our **values & our character** matter more than ever. This is what the government guidance has **continually missed** in this country & elsewhere – getting through this time is **not simply about following rules**, it is about **doing it for the right reasons**, the **proper way**. Because it is about **who we are**. *It ain't what you do, it's the way that you do it!*

As Christians **we believe** in the **value of every human life as a child of God made in his image**. We believe in **loving God** and **loving our neighbour as ourselves**. **Why wouldn't** we wear a mask and keep distance and even choose not to go to church **in order to protect others**? That's a **proper way** to respond!

And when we look at the current **difficult and concerning time** for our friends in the United States, what we see there again is that **what we do** in strange days and distressing circumstances **reveals who we really are, what matters to us** – and **what doesn't**. Let's pray for **peace and healing** in that nation and among its peoples.

The message of this chapter of the **Book of Ruth** may **seem obvious** to us – but a look around our world and our country right now reminds us that obvious or not, it is **being ignored** by a great many people. And that message is this: **what we do** shows **who we are** – what we **believe**, what **matters to us**. And if that is **living with faith & hope & love**, as St Paul put it, and as Ruth, Naomi and Boaz show us, then even if **no one else** does, **we** should **go and do likewise...** Because **that's the proper way to live as God's people**. Amen.

### Let us affirm our faith in the God who provides for us

We believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth.  
We believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord,  
who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary,  
suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried;  
he descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again;  
he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father,  
and he will come to judge the living and the dead.

**We believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church,  
the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins,  
the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Amen.**

**Let us pray to God for the strength and grace to follow Jesus**

Father God, you call us through your Son Jesus to live lives of love, compassion & grace. Teach us to hear his words & take them to our hearts.

Jesus said, 'Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant.'

Help us to be mindful of the needs of others, and to serve them as Jesus did.

Bless all in need at this time – and help us to respond generously to them.

*Lord in your mercy, **teach us how to live.***

Jesus said, 'Unless you change and become humble like little children, you

can never enter the kingdom of heaven.' Help us to live with childlike

wonder, open to the gifts and blessings of each present moment. Bless those

who are lonely or struggling at this time, and help us to reach out to them.

*Lord in your mercy, **teach us how to live.***

Jesus said, 'Blessed are the humble, for they will receive what God has

promised'. Help us not to be proud or to seek our advantage over others,

and to share the good things we have justly, fairly and generously. Help us

to seek first your kingdom in our lives – and to live the values we proclaim.

*Lord in your mercy, **teach us how to live.***

Jesus said, 'Be merciful as your Father is merciful: love your enemies and do

good to them'. Help us to reach out and offer forgiveness to others, even as

we may hope to be forgiven by them – and to work for reconciliation, even

in the hardest of situations. Bless and heal those who have been led astray

and into sin – help us not to give up on them and always to pray for them.

*Lord in your mercy, **teach us how to live.***

Jesus said, 'Love one another, as I have loved you'. Help us to love those

you put in our path each day, Lord, as you love them. Bless and heal those

who are sick or suffering at this time; strengthen those who feel weak and

powerless; and bring new hope to those who have little or none.

*Lord in your mercy, **teach us how to live.***

Jesus said, 'Go to people everywhere and make them my disciples, and I will be with you always, to the end of time.' Lord, as we spend so much time in our earthly homes, help us to remember we have a home with you, that you are with us always, and that you call us to share this good news with others – give us words and ways to reach out with your hope and love to those who do not know you. Speak into their lives & call them to you.  
**Merciful Father, accept these prayers for the sake of your Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ, Amen.**

## **The Lord's Prayer**

### **Hymn – Lord, for the years**     *Timothy Dudley Smith (b.1926)*

Lord, for the years your love has kept and guided,  
urged and inspired us, cheered us on our way,  
sought us and saved us, pardoned and provided,  
Lord of the years, we bring our thanks today.

Lord, for our land, in this our generation,  
spirits oppressed by pleasure, wealth and care;  
for young and old, for commonwealth and nation,  
Lord of our land, be pleased to hear our prayer.

Lord, for our world; when we disown and doubt him,  
loveless in strength and comfortless in pain;  
hungry and helpless, lost indeed without him:  
Lord of the world, we pray that Christ may reign.

Lord, for ourselves, in living pow'r remake us,  
self on the cross and Christ upon the throne;  
past put behind us, for the future take us,  
Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone.

### **Blessing**

May Christ draw you to humility and worship,  
and bring you to see God at work in the world and in your own life;  
and the blessing of God almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit,  
be upon you & remain with you, this day & always. **Amen.**