Rachel writes . . .

In the middle of October the clergy of Derby Diocese gathered at the Hayes Conference Centre in Swanwick for our annual Clergy Conference. Every year we have a guest speaker who gives us a series of talks about a book of the Bible. In 2025 the speaker's focus was St Matthew's Gospel, and this year we listened to talks about the book of Ruth in the Old Testament. It's one of the shortest books in the Bible, and has only 4 chapters.

The speaker focused on the examples of generosity (or absence of it) in the story. In chapter one we read the story of Naomi, who travelled to Moab with her husband and two sons. There her sons both marry Moabite women, but her husband and both sons die, and Naomi decides to return to Bethlehem. She releases her daughters-in-law from their obligations. One (Orpah) returns to her parents, the other, Ruth, declares that she will stay with Naomi. This chapter includes the passage people are most familiar with, which is sometimes read at weddings. Verse 16 includes these words:

Where you go, I will go;
where you lodge, I will lodge;
your people shall be my people,
and your God my God.

Naomi and Ruth return to Bethlehem; Naomi is bitter because of what she perceives God has done to her life. Ruth tries to support them both by gleaning wheat along the edges of the fields where the harvest is taking place. It is there she is noticed by a relative of Naomi, called Boaz, who gives her permission to gather more grain. The book ends with Boaz marrying Ruth; she bears him a son, a grandson for Naomi. The genealogy at the end of the chapter tells us that:

They named him Obed; he became the father of Jesse, the father of David.

And so the woman who had thought herself very badly treated by God becomes the grandmother to the boy, Obed, who will be the grandfather of King David, and St Matthew's Gospel opens with the genealogy of Jesus, where we find the same names, to demonstrate that Jesus is born of the line of David. Ultimately, Naomi is blessed, but certainly suffers a great deal in her life.

The speaker at Clergy Conference challenged us to think about God's generosity inn our own lives. Sometimes we see God's amazing gifts to us in our churches, when things are going well, numbers are growing and donations are increasing, but, just like Naomi, we might experience times of scarcity, times when it is hard to see evidence of God's generosity. ***Is God still King when things run out?*** That is how she challenged us.

Of course, you know I am going to say that he is, but in those times we can find ourselves struggling to pray, wondering what we are supposed to be doing. Ironically, it is sometimes when we look back on these times that we see God's plan for our life, how the timing worked out exactly as it should. But that doesn't mean that those times weren't really hard.

In November we spend valuable time remembering loss - at All Souls' we think about our loved ones whom we see no longer, and on Remembrance Sunday we gather to hear the names of those who gave their lives so we can live in peace. They are challenging times, as we face absence - but they also give us space to remember the blessings that people have been in our lives.

Blessings, Rachel CJN